SEVENTEEN

Alba Pratalia

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By Alpa Pratalia

Seventeen Seventeen Seventeen

Max clenched the sink drawer, fingers digging into the wood as he tried to channel his agony into anything other than the burning, stabbing, soul-rending fire erupting from his lower half. His breathing came in short, ragged gasps, forehead resting against the cool bathroom tile. The cold did nothing. There was no salvation.

"Seventeen seventeen seventeen seventeen."

The words came out in a hoarse chant, his only anchor in this moment of existential reckoning. A mantra born of sheer regret. *Seventeen dashes of Carolina Reaper sauce*—why the hell had he done it? A stupid bet? A moment of bravado? A need to prove, to assert his dominance over the spice world? It didn't matter anymore. What mattered was that he had, in effect, *napalmed his intestines*.

His head thumped rhythmically against the wall. A self-inflicted distraction. Bang. Bang. Bang. Maybe if he hit it hard enough, the pain in his skull would outmatch the one currently ripping through his rectum.

Outside, a voice drifted in from beyond the hedge.

"Hey man, you all right?"

Max blinked through sweat-drenched eyes. His salvation. His final message to the outside world. With a trembling hand, he grabbed a roll of toilet paper, pressed his bleeding fingers against it, and scrawled a truth no man should ever have to utter. Then, with the grace of a dying poet, he lobbed it through the window.

It unrolled mid-air, fluttering downward like a tragic banner of suffering.

"Shitting when you have hemorrhoids is like giving birth to a set of broken china."

A silence. Then, a horrified, whispered response from the neighbor:

"Jesus Christ, Max."

Max exhaled and let his head slump forward. The universe had to be watching. Somewhere, in some higher plane of existence, celestial beings were weeping in laughter. Seventeen dashes. Seventeen fucking dashes.

And now, as he sat in this porcelain prison, he knew.

There were no gods. No justice. Only pain.

Max reached for the pint of bourbon perched precariously on the edge of the sink. His hand was shaking—part agony, part sheer existential dread. He had *one* rule. Just *one*.

One pint. Not two. Never two after seventeen dashes.

He unscrewed the cap with his teeth and took a long, shuddering gulp. The bourbon burned, but it was a different burn—*a cleansing burn*. The kind that told him, *yes, you are still alive, and no, you will not die on this toilet like some spice-ridden Elvis*.

For a moment, the fire in his gut seemed to settle, pacified by the flood of alcohol. He closed his eyes, let the warmth crawl up his spine. Maybe—just maybe—he would survive this.

Then his stomach lurched.

No.

No no no no no.

A wave of nausea crashed over him like a cruel joke, a divine punishment for his arrogance. The bourbon and the Carolina Reaper sauce were now

conversing, and the conversation was heated. It was less of a discussion and more of a **bar fight** in his digestive tract.

His eyes snapped open. He had seconds—*mere seconds*—before all hell broke loose. He lunged forward, barely making it to the sink as his stomach **rebelled**.

The bourbon. The burrito. The inferno of seventeen. All coming back up like a cursed phoenix.

Outside, his neighbor had yet to leave.

"Jesus, Max, what the hell are you doing in there?"

Max wiped his mouth, staring at his reflection in the mirror, eyes wild, sweat pouring down his temples. He looked like a man who had seen the *other side*, a man who had danced with death and lost a shoe in the process.

"Surviving," he croaked.

And then, barely above a whisper—his new mantra.

"One pint. Just one. Never two. Never two after seventeen dashes."

Max barely had the strength to open the bathroom door, but when Angie scratched at it with an insistence that only a devoted dog could muster, he knew—he knew—she had arrived with salvation.

And there she stood. Angie, his beautiful, brilliant, four-legged saint, holding a tray of ice cubes between her teeth.

Max's lip trembled. He stared at her like a dying man glimpsing the gates of heaven.

"Holy saint of a good girl!" he gasped, reaching down to stroke her head with a shaking hand. Angie wagged her tail, proud of her delivery.

He didn't hesitate. No thought, no reflection, just **raw survival instinct**. He grabbed an ice cube with the precision of a surgeon and, in one swift motion, **shoved it up** with the desperation of a man drowning in molten lava.

And then—

Steam.

A **whistle**, like a tea kettle hitting full boil.

Max's eyes rolled back. His body convulsed. His very soul tried to exit his body through the top of his head. The cold was **divine**, an angel's kiss against the raging inferno that had consumed his entire lower hemisphere. **For the first time in an eternity, relief.**

Angie cocked her head, watching him with the wise eyes of a creature that did not understand human suffering but had, in her own way, just saved a life.

Outside, his neighbor had long since given up trying to understand.

"Max, man... I'm just gonna pretend I didn't hear that."

Max, forehead against the bathroom tile, panting like a marathon runner at the finish line, whispered in reverence:

"Angie. You are the patron saint of blistered assholes."

Angie wagged her tail again, satisfied with her good deed.

Many, many eons before...

Before the first ember of fire was tamed, before men stacked stones into cities, before the first fool dared seventeen dashes of Carolina Reaper sauce—there was only **chaos**.

Humans, foolish and lost, stumbled through the world in confusion, their days filled with struggle, their nights swallowed by darkness. They were lonely, hopeless creatures, forever at war with themselves and the universe. They needed something—**someone**—to guide them.

And so, God, in His infinite wisdom (and possibly a bit of regret for creating humans in the first place), looked down upon them and sighed.

"These poor bastards," He muttered. *"They're not going to make it on their own."*

So, in His mercy, He called forth His most loyal, most noble, most selfless celestial beings—the ones who had never questioned, never faltered, never done anything but love without condition.

"Go to them," He commanded. *"Protect them, guide them, love them even when they do not deserve it."*

But there was a problem. If humans saw these angels in their true form—radiant, winged, divine—they would **worship them**. They would build temples, offer sacrifices, **miss the entire point**.

So God did what only God could do.

He hid their wings.

He shaped them into **dogs**.

And so they came. Not with golden halos, but with wagging tails. Not with harps, but with boundless joy. Not with sermons, but with silent, steadfast devotion.

Through every war, every famine, every plague, through every heartbreak and loss, they stayed. Watching. Guarding. Loving. Saving foolish humans from themselves.

And that is why, when a man is at his lowest, when he is kneeling before the porcelain throne of his own

ruin, when his body is failing, and his soul is breaking, a dog will still be there. With a wag. With patience.

Or, if necessary, with a **tray of ice cubes**.

Because dogs are angels. And they will never abandon us.

Angie sat by the bathroom door, ears twitching in irritation. She watched Max slump against the toilet, his soul visibly trying to escape his body. The room smelled like regret, capsaicin, and the sour sting of **cheap bourbon.**

"It's the second pint," Angie thought with a resigned sigh. *"It's **always** the second pint of bourbon. Stick to vodka, I bark him. But does he listen? Noooo."*

Her tail flicked in mild exasperation.

"Were it at least scotch··· but no."

Angie shook her head, staring at the near-empty bottle of **bottom-shelf misery** sloshing around on the sink. She could smell it from here. Not a whiff of oaky refinement, no peaty whispers of the Scottish highlands. Just raw, unfiltered **"liquor store at the corner"** despair.

She pawed at the floor, suppressing the urge to **judge him harder.**

"You do this to yourself, Max."

Meanwhile, Max groaned, forehead sliding down the bathroom wall as he muttered, *"One pint. Never two. Never two after seventeen dashes."*

Angie sighed and laid her head down.

"Idiot."

Maria had seen a lot in her life. Growing up with Max meant she had long since abandoned any expectation of **normalcy**. There was no room for

shame between them—not after a childhood spent witnessing each other's worst moments, from accidental public nudity to that time Max tried to use a hammer to "fix" the toaster while it was still plugged in.

But tonight? Tonight was pushing even *her* limits.

She sat on the couch, one arm draped over Angie, absently stroking the dog's fur as Angie returned the favor with sloppy, unapologetic kisses to her wrist.

Maria wasn't really paying attention to Angie, though. No—her focus was locked on Max.

Max, who was bare-assed in the living room.

Max, who had commandeered her plastic laundry basin, filled it with ice cubes, Phenylephrine solution, and the shattered remnants of his dignity.

Max, who now sat in said basin with a dead-eyed stare, chugging what remained of his **second** pint of **bottom-shelf** bourbon.

Maria sighed.

"I should've gone to med school," she muttered.

Max took a slow, careful sip from the bottle. He winced—not from the bourbon, but from the **arctic hell** currently enveloping his lower half.

"You don't have the patience for that," he grunted.

Maria exhaled through her nose, contemplating her life choices.

*"No, but I **would've** had the patience to legally sedate you before you got to this point."*

Angie thumped her tail against Maria's thigh in agreement.

Maria rubbed her temples.

"Max. Why are you like this?"

Max shifted slightly in his **makeshift cryogenic recovery pod**, and an **unholy** whistle of steam **escaped** into the room.

Maria recoiled. **Angie yelped.**

Max just **grimaced** and muttered, *"Seventeen. Never two. Never two after seventeen."*

Maria **regretted everything.**

Maria: So, what are we going to do with the cabin?Max blinked.

Oh right. The cabin.

He had been so consumed by his **intestinal apocalypse** that he had momentarily forgotten about the latest *cosmic joke* life had decided to play on him and Maria.

Their uncle—an uncle they had *never heard of* before his death—had apparently left them **an inheritance**.

To the rest of the family? Oil fields, mines, plantations. **Actual wealth.**

To **Maria and Max**?

A **beach cabin.**

A **beach cabin** on a **forgotten, eroding strip of land** on the **Gulf of Mexico**.

A **beach cabin** situated **directly in the path of every hurricane** that had **hit the coast in the last twenty-five years**. And, according to every meteorologist ever, **in the path of every hurricane for the next several centuries.**

Max exhaled through his nose, ice cubes clinking ominously beneath him.

"Hence the first pint of bourbon," he mumbled.

Maria crossed her arms.

"Hence the burrito with seventeen dashes," she added.

Max nodded.

"Hence the second pint."

A **heavy silence** settled between them. Angie, ever perceptive, licked Maria's arm with the solemnity of a dog who understood human suffering but could do nothing about it.

Maria sighed, leaning back against the couch.

"So what the hell do we do with it?"

Max stared into the distance, his brain struggling to operate through the haze of **capcaicin-induced trauma and cheap liquor poisoning.**

Finally, he spoke.

"We could sell it."

Maria gave him a long, slow look.

Max sighed.

"Right. No one's gonna buy a cabin that's been used as a ***piñata*** *by God's worst storms since the dawn of time."*

Maria nodded.

A **longer** silence.

Then, Max took another sip of bourbon.

"You ever seen those survival reality shows?"

Maria narrowed her eyes.

"Max."

Max's lips curled into a **drunken, mildly unhinged grin.**

"I think we just found our retirement plan."

Angie perked up at the word *beach*. Her ears shot forward, tail wagging furiously as she **immediately** injected herself into the conversation.

"I like the beach!" she barked, slapping a paw onto Maria's leg for emphasis.

Maria stared down at her.

Max turned his bleary, bourbon-soaked eyes toward his dog, still perched in his **ice-cube-filled basin of suffering.**

"Of course you like the beach, Angie," he muttered. *"You're a dog. You don't have to pay for flood insurance."*

Angie tilted her head, confused.

"Flood insurance? You mean that fun thing where the ocean comes to visit?"

Max ran a hand down his face.

Maria sighed, rubbing Angie's ears.

"Angie, the beach in question is more of a ***post-apocalyptic wasteland*** *than an actual vacation spot. Think 'Hemingway's drunk ghost wandering a hurricane-battered hellscape' rather than 'long walks on the sand.'"*

Angie **blinked once**.

"I like the beach!" she barked again, tail thudding against the couch.

Maria exhaled sharply.

"Max. Your dog is an idiot."

Max took a sip of bourbon and winced as the **ice cube of salvation** shifted beneath him.

"Yeah. But at least she's ***enthusiastic*** *about this whole thing. Which is more than I can say for myself."*

Maria stared at her brother. Stared at **the basin**. Stared at **Angie**, who looked absolutely thrilled at the idea of hurricane-based property management.

Then, against all better judgment, she reached for the bourbon.

"Fine. Let's go see the damn cabin."

Angie **immediately** started **zooming around the room**.

"BEACH! BEACH! BEACH! BEACH!"

Max let out a long, slow breath, feeling the ice numbing **the sheer catastrophe of his existence.**

He nodded.

"One pint. Never two. Never two after seventeen."

Maria raised the bottle.

"You gonna be able to sit for this trip?"

Max **grimaced**.

"I'll ride in the back with my ass in a cooler."

Angie, still zooming, barked:

"ROAD TRIP!"

Maria looked at the trunk of her car and let out a long, slow sigh.

She had packed **like a normal person**—a suitcase with actual clothes, toiletries, a phone charger, and other **things responsible adults take on trips.**

Angie had packed like a **dog**—which meant she had **exactly one item**: her **beloved, battle-worn, half-mangled dinosaur squeaky toy**.

And then there was **Max.**

Maria stared at his "luggage."

A **six-bottle box of bourbon.**

A **Danish butter cookie tin**—which she **knew** damn well contained **zero cookies** and **one spare pair of**

socks, one spare pair of boxers, and an assortment of weed edibles.

She pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Max."

Max adjusted his sunglasses, leaning casually against the car.

"Yep?"

Maria waved at the **cookie tin of chaos**.

"What. The actual. Hell. Is this?"

Max took a sip from his **road bourbon** and shrugged.

"Packing light."

Maria closed her eyes. Took a breath. Counted to **seventeen**.

Then she opened the trunk, **shoved his entire 'luggage set' inside**, and slammed it shut before she could start throwing punches.

"Get in the car."

Angie, hopping into the backseat with her dinosaur toy, barked excitedly.

"BEACH! BEACH! BEACH!"

Max slid into the passenger seat, stretching out with all the smugness of a man who had long since accepted his own **questionable** life choices.

Maria sat behind the wheel, hands gripping it **just a little too tightly.**

Then, without a word, she turned on the engine and pulled out of the driveway.

The **hurricane-magnet death trap** of a cabin **awaited.**

The car rolled to a stop in front of what **used to be** a welcoming entrance sign. Now, it was **half-ripped, barely hanging on, battered by wind and time.**

The place was called **Panacea.**

Maria **stared** at the sign. **Then at Max. Then back at the sign.**

"You fucking kidding me now."

Max, still half-numb from his **ice therapy and bourbon-fueled stupor**, took a slow, reverent look at the name.

Then, with the **wisdom of a man who had made every possible mistake in a single night and survived**, he whispered:

"Finally, I'll heal those seventeen dashes."

In the backseat, **Angie was vibrating with joy.**

"BEACH! BEACH! BEACH!"

Maria dropped her forehead against the steering wheel and exhaled.

This was **going to be a long trip.**

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Tallahassee, for Its Own Citizens to Understand the Jokes Above:

panacea *(noun)*

pan·a·cea

Definition: A **remedy for all ills or difficulties**; a **cure-all.**

Example:

"The law will improve the lives of local farmers, but it is no panacea."

Additional Example, More Relevant to Local Idiots Named Max:

*"Seventeen dashes of Carolina Reaper sauce will absolutely destroy you, and **Panacea, Florida, will not fix that**—no matter how ironic the name."*

The car slowed as they approached the **cabin.**

Maria squinted through the windshield, **waiting for the inevitable disaster.**

Max leaned forward, blinking, still processing what his bourbon-drenched brain was telling him.

Angie pressed her nose to the window, tail thumping excitedly.

The cabin was... **intact.**

No gaping holes. No walls collapsed. No evidence of it being used as a projectile during the last Category 5.

Maria frowned.

"Really?"

Max rubbed his eyes.

The cabin was also... **modest.** Rustic, sure. But in **good taste.**

Maria's mouth fell open slightly.

"Seriously? In Tallahassee?"

Max shook his head in disbelief.

"I feel like we've entered the Twilight Zone."

Angie, however, **had no doubts.**

"BEACH!!" she barked, pawing at the window in ecstasy.

Maria put the car in park and sighed.

"I don't trust this. It's too... structurally sound. It's too ***well-designed*** *for Tallahassee."*

Max reached for his bourbon, took a sip, and nodded.

"Yeah. Something's off. Maybe we should burn it down just to balance things out."

Maria side-eyed him.

"Max. No."

Max shrugged.

"Fine. Let's at least go inside before a tornado personally introduces itself."

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Tallahassee, for People Unfamiliar with Northern Florida to Understand the Jokes Above:

Tallahassee:

No Tallahasseean has **ever** been recorded **successfully spitting from the shore to Cuba**, but Tallahasseans are **no quitters**, and **not a single citizen** has ever **desisted from trying.**
(Even when the shore is **not even in sight**.)

Reverse cowgirl position is forbidden in Tallahassee because **you never turn your back on family.**

The interior of the cabin was... **precious.**

Maria hated to admit it, but it was **downright charming** in its seaside decor. Light wooden walls, nautical knick-knacks, and **just the right amount of coastal kitsch** to make it feel warm instead of tacky.

But the weirdest part?

Everything—the couch, the chairs, the kitchen cabinets—was **at least a foot off the ground.**

Maria raised an eyebrow.

"Architects, right?"

Max, still standing in the doorway, took it all in with **wary suspicion.**

"What kind of freak designs a house like this?"

Maria shrugged.

"One that knows this place floods on the regular but still gives a damn about interior design."

But Angie? **Angie didn't care about architecture.**

The second the door was open, she had **dropped Dyno-Squeaky on the floor and bolted straight for the waves.**

By the time Maria and Max turned around, **she was already gone.**

"Guess she approves." Maria muttered, dropping her bags on the floor.

She looked at Max.

"Might as well..."

Max sighed, setting his **box of bourbon** and **cookie tin of life essentials** onto the **high table**, out of potential flood range. Then, with the expertise of a man who had spent **too much of his adult life at the**

mercy of bad decisions, he downed a couple of edibles and exhaled deeply.

"Fine."

And with that, he followed Maria and Angie onto the beach, walking into their new, hurricane-doomed life.

Four hours later.

Angie was happily swimming in the living room.

Max was sitting on the kitchen counter, completely dry, sipping bourbon straight from the bottle. His precious box of booze and edibles sat beside him, safe and untouched, because—say what you will about him—Max knew how to plan for disasters.

Maria?

Maria was offshore, breaststroking after her floating beauty case, cursing the Atlantic Ocean, the concept

of tides, the entirety of Tallahassee, and their dead uncle in equal measure.

Max rested one foot on the **steel plate** embedded **exactly one foot above the floor**—the very design feature that had baffled them earlier.

He took a **long sip of bourbon**, exhaled, and nodded to himself.

"Average high tide up here."

Angie did a **joyful doggy paddle** past him, **fully thriving** in this **amphibious nightmare.**

"BEACH! BEACH HOUSE! SWIMMING HOUSE!" she barked gleefully, slapping her paws in the water.

Maria, **struggling against the current**, let out a **furious scream.**

"MAX. I SWEAR TO GOD."

Max raised his bottle to her like a toast.

*"To **Panacea, Florida.** The cure for all our problems."*

Maria, still pursuing her drifting beauty case, absolutely did not see the humor in that.

The fire roared in the elevated firepit, precisely 3'½ feet above floor level—because of course it was. Everything in this godforsaken house was flood-proof.

Maria sat in front of it, arms crossed, clothes steaming as they dried. She was wrapped in a blanket she had yanked from a high shelf, shivering not from cold, but from sheer rage.

Outside, mosquitoes the size of .45/40 slugs slammed against the sealed mosquito nets, their impact audible, like nature itself was trying to break in and collect a debt.

Inside, **Max was slumped in a chair**, deep in **a whiskey-and-edible-induced existential drift**, eyes half-closed, body operating on **pure muscle memory and questionable survival instincts.**

Angie, however?

Angie was gone.

Not physically—physically, she was **lying belly-up on the elevated couch**, her tail wagging at a **geological** pace.

But mentally? **That dog was cruising the goddamn solar system.**

Because at some point, **in the great chaos of the evening**, she had successfully **stolen a pizza-flavored edible** right out of Max's tin box of sins.

And now?

Now Angie was **drifting through space**, contemplating **the vastness of existence**, watching

the moons of Jupiter pass by like dog treats on an eternal conveyor belt.

Max, completely incapable of **doing anything about it**, raised his bottle weakly in her direction.

"You good, girl?" he slurred.

Angie's ears twitched, but her **soul was still exiting Earth's orbit.**

"Beach... was a construct..." she murmured.

Maria, wringing out **her seawater-soaked shirt**, **not in the mood**, shot Max a look.

"Max. Your dog is stoned out of her mind."

Max blinked **slowly**.

"Yeah."

Maria sighed and turned back to the **firepit of dubious architectural necessity**.

Outside, the **mosquitoes slammed against the net** like **bullets on armor.**

Inside, Angie floated through **the outer rings of Saturn.**

And Max, gently swaying in place, muttered:

"One pint. Never two. Never two after seventeen."

The **fire crackled**. The **mosquitoes thumped** against the net like **determined little war machines**.

And then, from the couch, where **her soul was still adrift somewhere beyond the Kuiper Belt**, **Angie let out a long, slow, deeply satisfied:**

"Awoooooo!"

(*Translation: I love Florida!*)

Maria, **face buried in her hands, soaking in the absolute, unrelenting absurdity of her life**, muttered through gritted teeth:

"I hate Florida."

Max, drifting in his own drunken haze, blinked at nothing in particular.

Then, after a long pause, as if the very concept of geography had just been introduced to his consciousness for the first time, he slurred:

"Florida?"

Angie, still cruising through the cosmos, wagged her tail dreamily.

Maria, sitting in her soaking-wet misery, stared at the fire, the mosquito net, the manchild next to her, and the interstellar dog on the couch.

She inhaled deeply. Exhaled slowly.

Then, in a flat, emotionless tone, she whispered:

"I should've gone to med school."

Four hours later.

Maria was **asleep** in the **main bedroom**, sprawled across the **most comfortable mattress ever created by human hands**—a **glorious, cloud-like masterpiece of bedding**, suspended, of course, **exactly 3'½ feet from the floor.**

Meanwhile, **outside**, Maria's **car** was **rolling down a deserted road** at **9.82 mph in a 25-zone.**

The passenger's window cracked **open**.

A **clatter**—Max had just tossed an **empty pint bottle** onto the side of the road.

With the **precision of a man who had done this before**, he **cracked open the second**, lifted it to his lips, and took his **first sip.**

From the driver's seat, **Angie's ears flicked in irritation.**

"Fasten your seatbelt," she muttered. *"Told you twice already."*

Max exhaled. Shrugged. **Took another sip.**

…

…

Wait.

…

Max blinked **slowly**.

…

He turned his head.

…

Angie was driving.

His dog. His **actual dog**.

Her paws on the wheel. Her **laser-focused canine determination** locked onto the road ahead. The **glow of streetlights flickering** across her fur.

Max stared.

Angie didn't even look at him, just **jerked her head toward his chest** in that **universal gesture of annoyance**.

"Seatbelt. Now."

Max, feeling a **deep, spiritual sense of acceptance** wash over him, **clicked his seatbelt into place**.

…

…

He took another sip.

"Oh, all right then."

Fifteen... sixteen... seventeen... and eighteen.

A collective **gasp** rippled through the crowd of kids gathered in the **central square**.

Then—**chaos.**

"NO WAY, MAN!"

"DUUUUDE, HE'S DOING IT!"

"EIGHTEEN? IS HE EVEN HUMAN?"

Max sat on a weathered bench, a half-empty **pint of bourbon** in one hand and a **doomed burrito** in the other.

The kids **weren't wrong to be excited.**

Because **against all known medical advice**, Max had just **poured eighteen dashes of Carolina Reaper sauce onto his burrito.**

Eighteen.

Not seventeen. **Eighteen.**

Max took a **long gulp** of bourbon, his **final rites before the inevitable suffering.**

He inhaled deeply, whispered *"Reaper, here we go,"* and **bit down.**

The **entire square** fell **silent.**

And then—

Fire.

Max's **soul** tried to leave his body.

The **Carolina Reaper**, already a cruel mistress at **seventeen**, had **transcended** at eighteen. This was **no longer food.** This was **a gateway to hell.**

His mouth ignited. His throat blistered. His stomach shrieked in betrayal.

Max's **vision blurred.**

A **new reality unfolded before him.**

He was no longer **on Earth.** He was **floating in the void**, spiraling through **dimensions unknown**, a lone traveler in a **universe of capsaicin-induced enlightenment.**

Somewhere, in the **shadow of his hallucinations**, a spectral figure loomed. A **hooded, skeletal entity** cradling a **scythe.**

"Max," Death intoned. *"We meet again."*

Meanwhile, back in the real world, **Angie sat next to him, unimpressed.**

She let out a long, **exasperated sigh**.

"I told him to do vodka," she muttered.

Next Morning.

Max woke up first.

And, somehow—**miraculously**—he felt… **fine.**

No hangover. No pounding headache. No **regret-shaped bruises** from a night of questionable decisions.

More importantly… **no lower digestive tract problem.**

He blinked at the ceiling, then down at his own **fully intact, fully functional** body.

"What the hell?"

He sat up. **No dizziness. No cold sweats.**

Nothing.

Then Maria appeared in the doorway, **hair sleek and glossy like she had been air-dried by the gods themselves.**

She **stretched**, exhaling **deeply**, feeling a level of **joint mobility she hadn't experienced since her teenage years.**

*"I slept in a **3'½ foot-high bed** while a **3' tide** rolled in and out all night."* She rotated her shoulders, flexed her fingers, rolled her neck. **No stiffness. No humidity breathing issues.**

She flipped her **bone-dry, perfectly straightened** hair over her shoulder.

"Max," she said, voice **calm, reverent**. *"I have no joint pain."*

Max stared at her.

Then, from behind them, **Angie trotted in.**

Not smelling like wet dog.

In fact, **she smelled··· clean. Lightly salted, but clean.**

All three of them **turned to each other.**

A **pregnant silence.**

Then, **in perfect unison**, they whispered:

"Panacea!"

The wind **whistled through the palm trees.**

The mosquitoes **hovered in defeat outside the sealed nets.**

Somewhere in the distance, a **seagull cawed in holy reverence.**

This house.

This **cursed, hurricane-battered, mosquito-proof, structurally inexplicable** house…

…was a **miracle.**

It was the **best of times** (**in Panacea**).

It was the **worst of times** (**anywhere else**).

It was the **age of wisdom** (**having a regular diet and healthy eating habits**).

It was the **age of foolishness** (**eighteen dashes of Carolina Reaper sauce and two pints of bottom-shelf bourbon**).

It was the **epoch of enlightenment**, where **Maria awoke with a perfectly realigned spine**, **Angie**

smelled fresh despite swimming in saltwater, and Max's digestive tract defied the laws of biology.

It was the epoch of reckless abandon, where Max would undoubtedly tempt fate again, because man is doomed to repeat his mistakes, especially when there's a burrito involved.

It was the season of restoration, where the house somehow healed every affliction.

It was the season of recklessness, where Max—despite experiencing a full-body miracle—would absolutely find a way to nearly kill himself again before the week was over.

It was a blessing.

It was a trap.

It was Panacea.

A sharp knock rattled the door. Max opened it, blinking against the harsh sunlight.

Standing there, barely four feet tall, was a Seminole dwarf woman with hair dyed the vivid, unmistakable colors of the Florida Gators—electric blue and dazzling orange.

She stared up at him, eyes narrowed with amused suspicion.

"Mr. Eighteen Dashes, I presume."

Max blinked slowly. *"Uuuuh..."*

Without breaking eye contact, she lifted her shirt abruptly, flashing him with a casual, confident flourish. *"Follow me. Walk this way."*

Max nodded solemnly. Without missing a beat, he lifted his own shirt, revealing his proudly unsculpted man-boobs to the universe, and matched her exact strut—hips swinging theatrically as he stepped out the door behind her.

Angie, watching carefully, tilted her head in thoughtful confusion, then shrugged doggily and trotted merrily after them.

"Adventure!" Angie barked, tail wagging. *"Only in Florida!"*

Maria stood at the door, watching the trio disappear down the path—Max marching proudly with his shirt pulled up, the Seminole dwarf woman strutting with all the self-assurance of a rockstar, and Angie trotting eagerly behind them.

She shook her head slowly, closing the door with a resigned sigh.

"Well," she muttered, *"this definitely calls for a Floridian tradition."*

Maria crossed the room to Max's carefully positioned "survival" box, grabbed the nearest unopened pint of bourbon, and twisted off the cap.

She raised the bottle toward the ceiling in a sarcastic toast.

"Here's to early-morning, Floridian day drinking."

She took a long sip, savoring the burning comfort as it went down.

"Panacea indeed."

The Seminole dwarf guided Max and Angie through a hidden path, lush palms opening suddenly into a clearing vibrating with energy. Neon lights flashed, music pounded, and an enthusiastic, half-drunk, fully-Floridian crowd bounced and chanted in wild unison:

"EIGHTEEN! EIGHTEEN! EIGHTEEN!"

Max froze, eyes wide in awe and disbelief. Angie, wagging her tail fiercely, joined the chorus enthusiastically:

"I'm helping! EIGHTEEN! EIGHTEEN!"

Then, the crowd spotted Max. A roaring cheer exploded through the gathering like a tropical hurricane. Without hesitation, every single person—women and men alike—lifted their shirts in joyous unity, flashing their approval to the legendary "Mr. Eighteen Dashes."

Max grinned, nodded solemnly, and once more proudly lifted his own shirt, matching their energy. Angie spun in circles, barking:

"Best! Day! EVER!"

The crowd parted dramatically, creating a path to the clearing's center. Under a single, heavenly spotlight stood an altar-like pedestal. On it rested an ominously large burrito, a fresh bottle of Carolina Reaper sauce gleaming menacingly, and—not two—but **three** pints of bourbon.

The crowd, utterly delirious, began a new chant, even louder:

"TWENTY-ONE! TWENTY-ONE! TWENTY-ONE!"

Angie bounced excitedly, barking along, eyes wide in ecstatic anticipation. *"TWENTY-ONE! I LOVE NUMBERS!"*

The Seminole dwarf turned to Max with a solemn reverence befitting a sacred ceremony. Gently, she took his trembling hand and placed it firmly on one of her breasts, staring deep into his eyes.

"Only you can take us there, Eighteen-Dashes-Man," she whispered, her voice as serious as life itself.

Max swallowed hard, feeling the weight of destiny pressing down upon him.

This was it—the moment he'd been born for.

Max twisted open the bottle of Carolina Reaper sauce. A sinister whisper hissed forth from its depths, like the breath of Lucifer himself:

"Pape Satan, Pape Satan Aleppe..."

The crowd collectively gasped, instinctively stepping back, eyes wide with awe and reverence. Even Angie paused briefly, ears perked and tail frozen mid-wag.

Max picked up the burrito with solemn, trembling hands. Silence fell heavy over the clearing.

Then he began to dash.

And the crowd counted, voices trembling in ecstatic anticipation:

"Ooooone... twoooo... threeee..."

Back at the cabin, Maria lifted the empty glass, stared at the bottle, shrugged, and declared defiantly:

"Four."

She refilled the glass generously, raised it again with the solemn dignity of someone determined to honor the great Floridian traditions, and saluted nobody in particular:

"Five."

She took a long sip, savoring the burning, comforting embrace of bourbon. Outside, the palm trees rustled gently, whispering secrets of the madness unfolding elsewhere.

"Here's to you, Panacea," Maria muttered. *"May you cure everything—except my taste for day drinking."*

Meanwhile, at the local elementary school, Miss Pennyweather—her eyes glazed from inhaling a generous amount of shoe glue during arts and crafts—dutifully counted her students as they filed into class.

"Six... seven... eight..."

Little Timmy, bless his heart, hustled back and forth past the classroom door, wearing increasingly ridiculous disguises: a baseball cap, oversized sunglasses, a fake mustache made from Spanish moss.

"Nine... ten..." Miss Pennyweather mumbled dreamily, satisfied.

In truth, Timmy was the **only** student actually present. The others? They were already deep in the nearby swamp, gleefully wrestling baby gators and whispering heroic legends about Max, the mythical burrito warrior.

But in Panacea, Florida, such details hardly mattered.

Meanwhile, down Route 98, Ms. Chang was on her own leisurely Panacea adventure. With a grip tight

enough to turn her knuckles white, she cruised blissfully unaware at **20 mph in a clearly marked 65 mph zone**, her left blinker blinking merrily for the last eight miles.

In her rear-view mirror, a growing procession of cars stacked up behind her, honking furiously.

Ms. Chang adjusted her glasses and counted them with serene satisfaction:

"Eleven... thirteen... nineteen..."

She smiled gently, nodding to herself in approval. *"Oh, how polite! Such a nice parade today."*

Max's hand trembled as the twenty-first dash of Carolina Reaper sauce touched the burrito, glowing ominously under the spotlight. The crowd, eyes wide and hearts pounding, leaned in as one:

"Tweeeeenty.... aaaaaand.... twenty-ooooooneeeee!"

Silence.

Then, as if a cosmic dam had burst, chaos erupted.

People screamed in ecstatic jubilation. The air was electric; bodies surged forward, strangers hugged, shirts flew off, and drinks spilled freely. Cheers and chants thundered, echoing across Panacea like a sacred hymn.

"HE DID IT!"
"HE'S ASCENDED!"
"EIGHTEEN-DASHES-MAN NO MORE!"

Even Angie spun wildly in circles, barking at full volume, "BEST HUMAN EVER!"

From the swamp, the elementary kids charged in, baby gators in hand. Ms. Chang and her traffic parade rolled to a halt nearby, car horns blaring a celebratory fanfare.

In the heart of Panacea, beneath Florida's wild stars, Max raised the fateful burrito high above his head, accepting his rightful place among the legends.

Tonight, in Panacea, miracles were real.

Max steadied himself with a generous gulp from the first pint of bourbon, the fiery liquor blazing a clear, volcanic path down his throat. Then, with the bravery—or perhaps madness—of heroes long past, he raised the **twenty-one-dash burrito** to his mouth and bit down.

Time stood still.

Somewhere distant—perhaps tucked in an attic in a decaying London townhouse—a painting painted by Basil Hallward, bearing an uncanny resemblance to Max but dramatically aged and battered by vice, suddenly stirred to life.

The painted figure raised its head in weary horror, eyes widening, and whispered softly but distinctly:

"Oh no."

Back in Panacea, Max swallowed, his eyes watering, the earth spinning gently off its axis.

"Oh yes," he muttered defiantly, bourbon-raised, sauce-drenched, and fully embracing his destiny.

Max took that first bite and, for a single, terrible moment, felt the blazing embrace of death itself. But then, just as despair began to claim him—

It happened.

A surge of volcanic ecstasy burst through his brain. Endorphins flooded his bloodstream, washing away fear, regret, and every cautionary tale he'd ever ignored. The Carolina Reaper spice kicked in fully, sending him into a fiery, transcendent state of euphoria.

"Oh my god," he gasped, eyes wide. *"I'm having... a Carolina Reaper orgasm."*

The crowd exploded in triumphant joy. Max was hoisted high onto their shoulders, bourbon still clenched tightly in hand. They paraded him through Panacea as he gulped bourbon in glorious defiance, riding waves of pure, spice-fueled ecstasy.

Max raised his bottle to the heavens, shouting victoriously:

"PANACEA!"

The crowd roared back, the chant echoing into the Floridian night, forever immortalizing Max, the once-foolish-now-enlightened Burrito King.

Max stood on stage—well, more accurately, atop a weathered park bench beneath the soft glow of a lone lamp post—and held the half-eaten, sauce-soaked burrito to his lips as a makeshift

microphone. Bourbon bottle in hand, he poured his heart into song, voice echoing across Panacea:

"It comes down to reality,
And it's fine with me 'cause I've let it slide.
Don't care if it's a wet swamp or a hurricane beach,
I don't have any reasons, I've left them all behind.
I'm in a Panacea state of mind!"

The crowd, fully embracing the absurdity, went utterly wild, chanting along, swaying, and waving bottles high overhead. Angie howled joyfully, spinning in delighted circles.

Max raised his burrito microphone triumphantly, tears—partly spice-induced, partly from pure joy—streaming down his cheeks as he basked in the surreal glory of Panacea, Florida.

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Tallahassee, for Its Own Citizens to Understand the Reference Above:

New York is a city located *up north*, famous primarily as the original habitat of old people currently residing in Florida.

"*Up north*" means the direction you go if you scroll upward on Google Maps.

"*New York State of Mind*" is a famous song by Billy Joel, who—like most Florida grandparents—originally comes from the aforementioned *up-north* city.

Example of correct usage:
"Grandma used to live up north, but now she's in Tallahassee, fully embracing the Panacea state of mind."

The Seminole dwarf dropped to her knees before Max, eyes gleaming with reverence. Taking his hands, she pressed them firmly onto her breasts, ready to fully surrender herself to the glory of the twenty-one-dashes-god.

And instantly, she realized her **terrible, spicy mistake**.

Max's hands were still coated with **Carolina Reaper sauce**—and now her nipples burned with an intensity usually reserved for celestial punishments or the deepest pits of hell.

But she was made of tougher stuff.

Teeth clenched, eyes watering, she embraced the fiery torment like a warrior in a sun dance. After all, she was in the presence of the legendary **twenty-one-dashes-god**, and this—this fiery agony—was simply the price of divine revelation.

"Praise be," she whispered, voice tight with pain but radiant with devotion. *"Praise be to Panacea."*

Max lifted the second pint of bourbon triumphantly, eyes blazing with Carolina Reaper-fueled glory. The crowd, unified in reckless devotion, exploded once again:

"Chug! Chug! Chug! CHUG!"

And chug he did.

He chugged heroically.
He chugged defiantly.
He chugged—**chuggingly**.

Bourbon cascaded down his throat, extinguishing the flames momentarily, sending a new wave of delirious ecstasy through him.

Max slammed the empty pint onto the pedestal, raising both fists to the sky, burrito sauce dripping gloriously down his chin.

The crowd went insane.

Even Angie leapt around in circles, tail spinning like a helicopter blade, barking with wild enthusiasm:

"My human is a goddamn legend!"

It was delirium. Pure, uninhibited, Carolina-Reaper-and-bourbon-induced delirium.

The crowd was consumed by free love, transcending all boundaries, limitations, and societal norms. Ownership ceased; everyone belonged to anyone and everyone at once.

In a spontaneous, spicy-sauce-and-bourbon-fueled Woodstock, orgies blossomed everywhere, without warning or reservation. Men with women, men with men, women with women—humans embraced gators, rednecks passionately mingled with watermelons and cantaloupes in a glorious, melon-sweet communion.

From somewhere in the throng rose a collective, joyous chant:

"When the burrito is in the Seventh
House,
And bourbon aligns with Mars,
Then peace will guide the hot sauces,
And love will steer the crowd.
This is the downing of the Age of
Twenty-one!
The Age of Twenty-one!
Twenty-one! Twenty-one!

Panacea had ascended. The Age of Twenty-one had dawned.

And Max, the Reaper-sauce prophet, stood at its center, bourbon in hand, smiling beatifically at his deliciously chaotic kingdom.

All across the nation, word spread rapidly. Girls and boys alike left their homes behind, hitchhiking

toward the mystical Panacea, Florida—the land where troubles dissolved, bourbon flowed, and burritos blazed with fiery enlightenment.

They took to the highways, thumbs extended, proudly brandishing burritos and pint bottles of bourbon, their hair adorned lovingly with bright splashes of hot sauce.

In cars and trucks, on motorcycles and bicycles, the song echoed, a gentle anthem guiding them forward:

> *"If you're going to Panacea,*
> *Be sure to wear some hot sauce in*
> *your hair..."*

Panacea called—and the faithful answered.

Instead of secret handshakes or hidden symbols, the **Sons (and Daughters) of the Hot Sauce** embraced a simpler, purer greeting: they flashed one another

with radiant, joyful abandon. Inviting someone to touch your breast was seen not merely as flirtation, but as a profound gesture of reverence and spiritual camaraderie.

As pilgrims arrived by the dozens, then hundreds, a spontaneous initiative blossomed. Together, hands and hearts united, they built a grand stage in the heart of Panacea—plank by plank, bourbon-fueled inspiration guiding them.

Slowly but surely, artists felt the magnetic pull of this saucy Woodstock. Among the first was the venerable Joan Baez herself. Bless her heart, she ascended the makeshift stage, and with serene dignity (and utterly unsolicited), lifted her shirt high and flashed the adoring crowd.

It would have been an extraordinary gesture some sixty years earlier. Now it was... perhaps less so. Yet the crowd, overflowing with love and bourbon,

cheered wildly anyway—not for the flash itself, but for Joan's enduring spirit, her enormous heart, and for the simple truth of Panacea: love is love, hot sauce is hot sauce, and age is just another number in the sacred counting of dashes.

Panacea had truly begun.

Max ascended the stage alongside the legendary Patti Smith, each step a triumph. He held his half-eaten burrito and Carolina Reaper sauce aloft, symbols of unity, peace, and fiery self-discovery.

As Patti raised her hands toward her shirt, smiling gently, ready to honor the sacred greeting, a group of makeshift security guards swiftly (and gently) intervened.

"No, no—really not necessary, ma'am," one guard whispered politely. *"We genuinely appreciate the thought—just as if we had accepted."*

Patti nodded gracefully, understanding perfectly.

The crowd cheered once more, honoring her intention, as Max proudly hoisted the burrito high. Together, he and Patti Smith led the chant once more:

"Twenty-one! Twenty-one! Twenty-one!"

The new Age of Panacea surged onward.

Max, riding high on endorphins, bourbon, and fiery enlightenment, bit once more into the sacred burrito. Sauce dripping from his chin, he gripped the third pint in his teeth, expertly twisting open the cap. The crowd fell silent, witnessing this ultimate communion.

Then, from deep within the collective soul of Panacea, arose a singular chant—reverent, primal, unified:

"Twenty-one and three! Twenty-one and three! Twenty-one and three!"

Overwhelmed by ecstatic devotion, Angie leaped joyfully off the stage into the welcoming embrace of the crowd. Hands reached skyward, catching and cradling her gently, parading her triumphantly above their heads.

Angie barked blissfully, floating on a sea of love and hot sauce spirituality:

"I'm a goddess! I'M A GODDESS!"

And in Panacea, at that perfect, spicy, bourbon-drenched moment—she absolutely was.

Max took his final bite of the divine, twenty-one-dash burrito, gulped down the last drop of the third pint, and then—with the peaceful dignity of a prophet who had fulfilled his destiny—collapsed into the gentle arms of the waiting crowd.

They lifted him tenderly, reverently, forming a holy procession illuminated by bourbon bottles held aloft like torches. Singing softly yet fiercely, they carried their beloved sauce-savior back to the cabin.

Inside, Maria lay on the flooded floor, giggling and splashing in precisely **1'⅜ of rising tide**, now fully committed to the Panacea lifestyle.

With great care, the crowd lifted Max onto the elevated bed, tucking him in gently. They then gathered Maria—soaked but smiling blissfully—and placed her beside her brother, tucking her in with equal tenderness. Lastly, they set Angie gently at Max's side, her tail wagging softly as she drifted into cosmic dog dreams.

Their mission complete, the congregation of Panacea quietly exited the cabin, returning to the still-raging concert, voices harmonizing once again:

"This is the downing of the Age of
Twenty-one!
The Age of Twenty-one!
Twenty-one! Twenty-one!"

Peace descended upon the cabin—Max, Maria, and Angie safe within their sanctuary, dreaming sweet, spicy, bourbon-infused dreams in the holy land of Panacea.

And when morning came...

They awoke exactly as people do in breakfast commercials: impeccably groomed, hair neatly combed, skin freshly washed, and with breath as fresh as spring rain.

Max stretched luxuriously, feeling inexplicably healthy—no hangover, no residual Carolina Reaper devastation. Maria sat up beside him, her hair cascading smoothly like a shampoo ad, her eyes bright and clear.

And Angie? Angie's fur was impossibly soft and dry, as if groomed by divine hands, smelling softly of velvet and ocean breeze. She bounded joyfully between them, showering both Max and Maria with slobbery kisses, each kiss carrying the gentle fragrance of seaside paradise.

Max and Maria exchanged an amazed glance, then simultaneously sighed in perfect contentment.

"Ah," they said together, smiling serenely, *"Panacea."*

And then they noticed.

Slowly. Simultaneously.

They were **both naked**. Completely, irrevocably naked.

Then their eyes caught sight of something else—something far worse than mere nudity. An

unmistakable trace, a glistening path like a snail's trail, stretched from Maria's crotch straight to Max.

Time paused. They stared, frozen in disbelief, horror dawning slowly, reality unfolding like a nightmare.

Two or three eternal seconds passed as the realization sank in.

And then—

They both screamed.

A raw, primal, earth-shattering scream of utter panic. A scream that echoed across Panacea, startled seagulls into flight, and rattled the very foundations of their miraculous, flood-resistant cabin.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

Pure, unadulterated panic.

Their screams spiraled upward, echoing off the cabin walls, bouncing between the ceiling beams and floorboards, reverberating through every inch of Panacea. Angie flattened herself on the bed, ears pinned back, watching her beloved humans lose their minds.

Maria stumbled backward, eyes wide, breath shallow, mouth agape in a silent, horrified O. Max frantically tried—and failed—to cover himself, hands flailing uselessly, voice cracking as he continued to scream.

It was absolute, irrecoverable, catastrophic panic—the kind that crawls under your skin and burns through your veins.

And outside, calmly, the gentle waves of Panacea continued to roll in, whispering soothingly:
"It's okay. You're in Panacea. Everything heals here..."

But inside, Max and Maria only knew panic.

And so they screamed. And screamed. And screamed.

And then, as the human screams reached an ear-splitting crescendo, Angie raised her head to the heavens and howled, her voice cutting through their horror like a celestial revelation:

"AWOOOOOOOO! YOUUUUUU SO MUCH DID IT LAST NIGHT!"

Max and Maria froze mid-scream, eyes bulging, mouths hanging open, horror now reaching transcendent levels of panic. They slowly turned toward Angie, whose tail wagged innocently, eyes wide with the honesty only a dog can possess.

"What?" Angie tilted her head, confused at their shock. *"I mean, you SO MUCH did it."*

Max and Maria exchanged one more glance of pure, existential terror—and immediately resumed screaming. Louder this time. Louder and louder and louder.

A knock on the door sliced through their panic. Maria and Max froze mid-scream, eyes wide in renewed terror.

Knock. **Louder this time.**

Scrambling desperately, they grabbed the first clothing they found—shirts inside-out, shorts

backward—and shuffled to the door, forcing shaky smiles like a perfectly normal, wholesome brother-and-sister family.

Max opened the door.

Standing there was the Seminole dwarf lady, radiant beneath the Florida sun. Without hesitation, she flashed them both and solemnly declared,
"Hail to you, Holy Twenty-one-god!"

Then she noticed Maria standing awkwardly behind Max. Her eyes lit up warmly.
"Oh, hello Mrs. Twenty-one," she said reverently, gently taking Maria's trembling hand and placing it firmly on her breast.

Max leaned in nervously, whispering helpfully,
"It's a sign of deference."

Maria just stared, speechless.

Max cleared his throat, adding quickly,
"She's not my wife."

The Seminole dwarf nodded knowingly, smiling with serene wisdom.
"I know. She's your sister." She paused, then asked cheerfully, *"So, how was your first night of inbreeding?"*

Maria and Max turned to stare at each other, eyes bulging, jaws dropping. A fresh wave of horror washed over them, and they immediately began screaming again—louder and more desperately than ever before.

Angie joined in enthusiastically, tail wagging.
"AWOOOOOO!"

The Seminole dwarf calmly adjusted her shirt and smiled gently, nodding in welcome.
"Welcome to northern Florida."

The Seminole dwarf moved around the kitchen as comfortably as if she'd lived there her entire life, casually brewing coffee. Maria and Max, by now, had stopped screaming, their eyes glazed over as they stared helplessly into the abyss of their questionable choices.

Meanwhile, Angie was animatedly pacing back and forth between them, wagging her tail and eagerly retelling the scandalous tale from the night before.

"Dude! You just went BAM on her," Angie barked excitedly. *"And then she took your thing, and you put your thing into her thing, and she helped you do the—"*

Fortunately, Maria and Max heard only enthusiastic barking: "Woof! Woof-woof-woof! Woof!" But the Seminole dwarf, coffee mug in hand, listened intently, eyes wide with fascination.

"Noooo!" she gasped. *"And then what?!"*

Angie leaned closer, whisper-barking conspiratorially:
"Then they did this really weird thing with—"

Maria and Max just kept staring straight ahead, blissfully unaware of Angie's explicit narration and the Seminole dwarf's mounting fascination.

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Tallahassee, for People Unfamiliar with Northern Florida:

Unlike Wikipedia, Pornhub does not provide a page in Simple English.

We have never fully understood that step-brother, step-sister phenomenon.

So, here in northern Florida, we skipped straight to the real deal.

Family is important.

Maria gazed out toward the distant line of sand dunes, pale and shimmering gently beneath the Panacea sun.

“They look like white elephants,” she murmured softly.

Max took another thoughtful sip of his bourbon, squinting into the horizon. “I've never seen one,” he said quietly.

Maria’s lips curved into a faint, bittersweet smile. “No,” she whispered, “you wouldn't have.”

Maria stared at him, eyes glistening, voice shaking. *"Of course it's an accident,"* Max said flatly. *"I know that."*

"Stop it," she whispered.

"Don't worry," he continued calmly. *"There will be a certain amount of unpleasantness, but I will have some photographs taken. You're perfectly all right."*

"Stop it," she said again, her voice cracking.

Max took another slow sip of bourbon, looking away. *"There's a hell of a lot to be done,"* he murmured.

"Stop it. Stop it. Stop it," Maria cried, each plea more desperate than the last.

Max turned toward her, his flat eyes meeting hers coldly.
"I'm through now," he said finally. *"I was a little angry."*

"Oh, please stop it," Maria pleaded, almost whispering. *"Please, please stop it."*

Max nodded, the hardness easing from his expression.
"That's better," he said quietly. *"Please is much better. Now I'll stop."*

The Seminole dwarf leaned down toward Angie, eyebrows knitted in confusion.

"Why have they suddenly gone full Hemingway?" she whispered.

Angie looked up knowingly, tail wagging calmly.

"Woof woof," she barked reassuringly. *(That's fine, they do it all the time. You only have to worry when they go Faulkner.)*

Maria and Max slowly turned toward each other, their eyes meeting cautiously. A quiet, uncomfortable understanding passed between them, heavy and lingering. A shared shiver ran down their spines.

They both quickly looked away, turning their gazes back to the dunes—the white elephants shimmering silently in the Panacea sunlight.

"Let's never talk about this again," Maria whispered softly.

Max nodded solemnly, taking another quiet sip of bourbon.

Behind them, Angie sighed knowingly. *"Humans,"* she muttered.

Joan Baez and Patti Smith walked gently along the shoreline, where the waves kissed the sand with soft, rhythmic whispers. Spotting Maria and Max staring out across the dunes, the two women paused, exchanged quiet smiles, and began to serenade them, their voices blending beautifully with the rolling surf:

"There's no need for anger
There's no need for blame
There's nothing to prove
Everything's still the same
Just a table standing empty

By the edge of the sea
Means farewell, Angelina
The sky is trembling
And I must leave..."

The gentle melody washed over Maria and Max like a comforting wave, easing the unspoken tension between them.

Maria exhaled slowly, the weight in her chest beginning to lift. Max closed his eyes, letting the peaceful harmony carry away his anxieties.

Behind them, Angie curled her tail contentedly.

"Panacea," she whispered softly to herself.

Maria, softly and dreamily, in a sort of peaceful high: *"What the fuck anyway?"*

Max, gazing off serenely, bourbon still lingering on his lips: *"Oh yes... we had a spicy-sauce Woodstock."*

Maria, gently nodding, eyes half-closed: *"Good for you."*

Behind them, Angie and the Seminole dwarf held paw in hand, voices joining in harmonious chorus:

"Call me any name you like
I will never deny it
But farewell, Angelina
The sky is erupting
I must go where it's quiet..."

The music melted gently into the ocean breeze, becoming one with the waves and drifting softly toward eternity.

"Panacea," whispered Angie, closing her eyes in reverent bliss.

Joan and Patti stood side by side, their voices soft and clear, gently drifting through the salty Panacea breeze:

"It ain't no use to sit and wonder why, babe
If'n you don't know by now
And it ain't no use to sit and wonder why, babe
It'll never do somehow
When your rooster crows at the break of dawn
Look out your window and I'll be gone
You're the reason I'm a-traveling on
But don't think twice, it's all right..."

Maria and Max listened quietly, the melody slowly unraveling their confusion and discomfort. The simple truth of the lyrics settled in their chests, and slowly, they began to understand something.

They didn't need explanations. They didn't need blame or regret. Sometimes things happened—spicy

sauces, bourbon-induced chaos, inexplicable Florida miracles—and sometimes they just had to let it be.

They exchanged a quiet glance, nodding gently. Maria smiled faintly, and Max let out a sigh, relaxed and relieved.

"Don't think twice," Max murmured softly.

Maria closed her eyes and exhaled. *"It's all right."*

The Seminole dwarf leaned down conspiratorially toward Angie, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Wanna see something fun?" she whispered.

Angie's tail wagged enthusiastically. *"Always!"*

Seminole approached the cabin wall, gently scraping off a small corner of dried, peeling paint. She cupped the dusty flakes carefully in her palm, grinning wickedly.

Then, stepping quietly onto the porch where Maria and Max sat serenely, she took a deep breath and blew the powdery paint toward them.

The flakes drifted gently, glittering in the Panacea sunlight—and as soon as they touched Maria and Max, their eyes glazed over.

An unmistakable energy crackled in the air. Clothes flew off as if propelled by unseen hands. Rationality vanished, replaced instantly by pure, primal lust.

Within moments, Maria and Max went full Pornhub—complete with exaggerated moans, unnecessarily gymnastic positions, and dialogue that would make even Florida blush.

Seminole leaned back against the porch railing, nodding with satisfaction. Angie tilted her head, watching curiously.

"Humans are so weird," Angie mused, wagging her tail happily.

Joan Baez and Patti Smith watched from a respectful distance, smiling through tears, deeply moved by the purest essence of free love unfolding before them.

Angie, blissfully unaware of the complex (and possibly troubling) subtleties of human family dynamics, wagged her tail enthusiastically.

"Woof woof!" she barked joyfully. *(Way to go, guys!)*

The Seminole dwarf nodded knowingly, a serene smile on her lips.

"It's this cabin," she whispered softly, reverently. *"Panacea does this to people."*

Maria felt pleasure rise first, washing over her in a wave of reckless, forbidden ecstasy. She shivered, collapsing forward softly. Then came Max, exhaling

deeply, his head gently resting against her back as the intensity melted away into peace.

But as their breathing steadied, clarity rushed back in with cruel immediacy.

Slowly, Maria turned her head. Max lifted his.

Their eyes met.

The serene haze shattered instantly, replaced by the cold, horrifying realization of what they'd done.

Together, they drew in a sharp breath—

And once again, they screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.
And screamed.
And screamed.
And screamed.
And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

Angie threw her head back joyfully, joining their chorus of existential dread:

"AWOOOOOOO!" *(I'm helping!)*

The Seminole dwarf shook her head slowly, sighing with patient amusement.
"These outsiders..." she muttered softly.

Nearby, Joan Baez and Patti Smith gently linked arms and began serenading the scene, their voices harmonizing with heartfelt sincerity:

> *"We shall overcome,*
> *we shall overcome,*
> *we shall overcome some day..."*

Maria stared into the void, shuddering.
"Eeeeew," she whispered softly.

Max, equally traumatized, nodded in solemn agreement.
"The horror," he echoed hoarsely. *"The absolute horror."*

Meanwhile, Angie wagged her tail happily, oblivious to everything except the sheer joy of singing and chaos.
"Awooooooo!" (Best day ever!)

The Seminole dwarf smiled gently, scraping a bit more of the mysterious cabin paint from the wall. With a mischievous twinkle, she blew the powder once more toward Maria and Max.

Instantly, their horror faded, replaced by a seductive warmth.

Max traced his finger slowly down Maria's spine, whispering softly, *"You know? You're not a bad fuck at all...for a sister."*

Maria smiled coyly, sliding her fingertip slowly from his pelvis upward to his navel, then sternum, murmuring back, *"You're not bad either, after all...for a brother."*

Seminole sighed, deeply moved. *"Aww, the magic of this cabin..."*

Behind them, Joan Baez and Patti Smith stood arm in arm, singing sweetly into the gentle Panacea breeze:

> *"Oh, deep in my heart*
> *I do believe*
> *We shall overcome, someday..."*

And Angie, wagging her tail in blissful ignorance, barked joyously once again:

"AWOOOO!" (Family values!)

All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

But here in Panacea, Max and Maria had found their own peculiar path—somewhere between joy, horror, bourbon, hot sauce, and spontaneous Florida chaos. They might not have fit neatly into Tolstoy's categories, but then again, Tolstoy had never been to Panacea.

Seminole watched, satisfied, as Angie wagged her tail in blissful ignorance. Joan and Patti sang softly on the porch. And Max and Maria, entwined in their bizarre harmony, embraced the strange magic of Panacea—their own, uniquely Floridian, happy-unhappy family.

Just as Joan and Patti were fading into a gentle hush, the air shifted—something changed.

The breeze carried a different kind of energy, a presence unlike any other.

And then he appeared.

Tony Bennett.

His polished shoes glided effortlessly across the sand, untouched by its grit. His razor-sharp suit remained unfazed by the oppressive 300% Florida humidity, his crisp white pocket square immaculate, as if nature itself dared not wrinkle him.

He strode forward, hands in pockets, surveying the scene. Max and Maria lay in their post-paint, post-everything bliss, Angie stretched out in contentment, Seminole nodded knowingly.

Then, with a voice smooth as aged bourbon and deep as Florida swamps at midnight, he sang:

> "Brothers, sisters, listen to what we say..."

The crowd stirred. Heads turned. Ears perked. A collective hush fell.

Joan and Patti gasped, eyes widening.

"Woooow... like heavy, Tony!" whispered Joan, clutching Patti's arm.

Tony adjusted his cufflinks. His voice rang out again, rich with timeless wisdom:

> **"Moanin' and groanin' won't drive**
> **those blues away."**

Another gasp.

"Double wooooow..." Patti muttered, her knees going weak.

Tony Bennett, the legend himself, was casting judgment upon Panacea.

And then, with a sudden, **unforgiving swing**, he delivered the verdict:

> **"Lift up your voices in song**
> **You know you've all done wrong!"**

Max and Maria **sat up in a panic**.

Angie **yelped in shock**.

Seminole **stopped mid-coffee sip**, eyes going wide.

The whole beach **froze**.

Tony Bennett was **castigating them**.

But before panic could take full hold, he lifted a hand, calm and divine, his voice now carrying them to salvation:

> **"You sinners, drop everything**
> **Let that harmony ring**
> **Up to Heaven**
> **Sing, you sinners!"**

And as his golden voice soared into the Panacea sky, the whole damn town **rose as one**, **arms lifted**, **voices trembling in redemption**, and **sang**.

For **they were sinners**.

And **Tony had come to deliver them.**

And then, **Tony got cruel.**

His voice, once warm like the golden glow of an old jazz club, **turned sharp, pitiless**—a velvet hammer of judgment. His piercing blue eyes scanned the crowd with **merciless precision**, stripping them down to their **most sinful essence**.

He took a step forward, the weight of his **flawless leather shoes** making no imprint on the sand, yet **every soul trembled beneath him.**

His voice rang out, smooth yet cutting like a diamond-edged blade:

"You're wicked and you're depraved..."

The gathered sinners **winced. Heads bowed.** A few clutched their chests, as if their **sins physically ached** under his scrutiny.

"And you've all misbehaved..."

Maria shuddered. **Max wiped a single bead of sweat** from his brow. Angie, sensing the **divine reckoning**, **rolled over onto her back, paws in the air in total submission.**

Even Joan Baez, who had seen **many things** in her time, clutched Patti Smith's arm in fear. **"Tony's gonna break them,"** she whispered.

Tony, standing **tall and unyielding**, lifted his hands to the sky, his command absolute:

> **"If you wanna be saved**
> **If you wanna be saved..."**

A **terrified hush** fell over the town of Panacea.

Max **gulped**. Maria **clutched her shirt**, knuckles white. Seminole **clutched her heart**. The gator-wrestling children **stared wide-eyed**, gators forgotten.

Tony **lowered his arms**. The air **held still.**

And then, he **delivered the final judgment**:

"Well... sing, you sinners!"

The weight of their **sins**, their **depravity**, their **unholy twenty-one-dash, bourbon-fueled Floridian madness**, **collapsed in on them all at once.**

And so they sang.

Like **a desperate, trembling gospel**, voices **rose to the heavens**.

From the **most sinful redneck** to the **purist Seminole**, from **Joan and Patti** to **Angie's joyous howling**, from the **sinners still tangled in their previous night's mistakes** to the **innocent fools who just got here**—

They sang.

And **Tony smiled**, for his work had begun.

And so, **the entirety of the Hot Sauce Woodstock of Panacea** gathered around the cabin, spilling onto the dunes, their bodies moving in **frenzied, ecstatic repentance.**

They **danced and sang**, wailing like **souls in hell**, their voices lifted in glorious, sinful surrender.

And then—**from nowhere, from everywhere, from beyond the fabric of time itself—Benny Goodman's orchestra appeared.**

A ghostly **brass section** erupted, clarinets screaming, drums pounding, the unmistakable rhythm of **"Sing, Sing, Sing"** igniting the crowd into a **giant, demonic swing frenzy.**

Tony Bennett stood at the center, arms spread wide, orchestrating their salvation through jazz.

Joan Baez and Patti Smith twirled each other in wild abandon.

Maria and Max, locked in existential terror, found their limbs **betraying them**, pulled into the infernal swing of redemption.
Seminole and Angie spun together, one paw, one hand, moving in **ritualistic sync.**
Rednecks swung watermelons over their heads like dance partners.
Gators shuffled in rhythm, tails **slapping in sync with the snare drum.**

It was madness. It was salvation.

The sky **boiled red**, the ocean **froze mid-wave**, time itself **staggered.**

And still, the **music roared**.

And still, **they sang**.

The entire Panacea congregation—**the hot sauce Woodstock disciples, the repentant sinners, the gator-wrestling children, the rednecks cradling their

melons, the ghosts of Benny Goodman's band—
all danced and sang in **chaotic, feverish worship.

Tony Bennett stood at the pulpit of the porch, **radiating divine authority**, leading them like a jazz preacher:

> **"Sing, sing, sing!**
> **And make music with the heavens!"**

The **horns blared**. The **clarinets wailed**. The **snare drum pounded like the heartbeat of the universe.**

The entire crowd, **voices raw, bodies possessed**, lifted their arms skyward:

> **"Sing, sing, sing!**
> **Grateful that You hear us!"**

Max and Maria, **beyond shame, beyond reason,** flung themselves into the madness, bodies jerking to the irresistible rhythm, limbs flailing in divine surrender.

Joan Baez and Patti Smith, locked in a holy embrace, spun like ecstatic saints.

The Seminole dwarf, grinning like an oracle who had seen it all, held Angie's paw high as they howled and twirled:

> "We shout Your praise!
> Lift high the name!"

And above them all, the sky trembled.

The heavens themselves paused, listening.

And then—

The floodwaters rose.

The Atlantic roared toward Panacea, surging, ready to baptize the faithful in one final, cleansing wave.

The roar of the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico grew and grew, an apocalyptic symphony of wind and water, an unstoppable tide of flood and fury.

The **hurricane mounted**, the sky **turned black**, and the air crackled with **raw, divine electricity**—Panacea was **being judged.**

And yet, as the storm **raged**, Joan Baez and Patti Smith stood tall against the winds, their voices rising above the chaos, carrying the **final song of the reckoning**:

> **"Yes, that's the story of the Hurricane**
> **But it won't be over 'til they clear his name**
> **And give him back the time he's done**
> **Put in a prison cell, but one time he coulda been**
> **The champion of the world!"**

The words **cut through the gale**, defiant, unwavering, a hymn for **every lost soul, every sinner dancing on the dunes of Panacea.**

And in that moment, as the **storm reached its peak**, the **Seminole dwarf took action.**

She grabbed **Angie first, shoving her inside the cabin.**

"Go!" she commanded.

Angie **whined**, resisting, but the **doorframe pulled her in like fate itself.**

Then she turned to **Maria and Max**—still dazed, still trembling from **too much love, too much madness, too much truth**—and with a firm **push**, she **sent them stumbling inside as well.**

Maria turned, **panicked, reaching for her.**
"What are you doing?!" she cried.

Max tried to grab the door, but the **winds slammed it shut.**

Outside, the **Seminole dwarf smiled**, standing firm against **the coming flood, the final judgment, the cleansing of Panacea.**

"I'll be well," she whispered.

Then, **locking them in**, she pressed her hand to the door, sealing them inside their **sanctuary**.

"But you're safe here."

The wind **whipped her hair,** but she stood unshaken.

"Stay."

A deep breath.

A final smile.

"And love."

And then, the **wave came.**

And in the cabin… **nothing.**

Not a whisper from outside. Not a single gust of wind. **Not even the tide rising this time.**

Silence.

A deep, **unnatural**, **enveloping silence.**

Maria and Max stared at each other, then at Angie, who yawned contentedly, stretching out as if they weren't trapped in the eye of an apocalyptic storm.

The air was **calm, too calm**. They **lit a fire in the fireplace**, half-expecting it to flicker from phantom winds, to shudder from the **world-ending chaos outside**—but the flames **did not move.**

The structure **stood firm**, **untouched**, the cabin itself wrapping around them **like a womb**, an ancient thing, **giving them a long, dreamless sleep.**

So, sleep they did.

All three of them.

On the **big main bed.**

(*Note: There were two* ***very comfortable*** *guest bedrooms in the cabin, each equipped with* ***luxurious bedding*** *and* ***flood-resistant comfort****, but when* ***incest calls*** *… well…*)

Panacea had **made its choice.**

Angie had always been a fan of classic westerns. Something about the wide-open landscapes, the fearless gunslingers, the dramatic showdowns—it all spoke to her **deep, instinctual love for adventure and heroism**.

So, when **Maria was savagely riding Max in the dead of night**, slapping him across the face and growling, **"Who's your big sister?"**, Angie immediately **recognized the raw spirit of frontier justice.**

She **perked up**, her tail wagging in **excited approval**.

"Woof woof!" she barked enthusiastically.

(*Translation: "I love John Wayne!"*)

The **scene before her** had all the hallmarks of a classic western—**grit, domination, wild untamed energy, and a decisive display of power.**

Angie settled in comfortably at the foot of the bed, nodding to herself. **If John Wayne had been reincarnated as an incestuous Floridian fever dream, this was exactly how he'd do it.**

Morning came.

The cabin, untouched by the apocalypse outside, sat in eerie silence.

But then—**a knock on the door. Loud. Demanding.**

Max, still groggy, still trying to process the **bizarre holiness of the night before**, rubbed his face and went to answer it **alone**.

As he opened the door, his breath **caught in his throat.**

The beach was **gone.**

What stretched before him now was **mayhem, chaos, and destruction.**

Trees ripped from the ground.
Cars overturned, half-buried in sand.
Fragments of houses, shattered boats, scattered wreckage.

Panacea, so perfect, so untouchable, had **not been spared after all.**

And yet, in the middle of the destruction, **stood a man.**

Unkempt hair, disheveled beard, eyes sharp as broken glass. A **cat perched lazily on his shoulder, indifferent to the ruin**. A **dog, large and watchful, stood beside him, sniffing the air like he already knew too much.**

The man tilted his head, studying Max as if measuring something **deeply invisible**. Then, in a voice rough with exhaustion yet edged with biting intelligence, he spoke:

"Hello, my name is Álvaro Diderot, and they tell me I have business with you."

Before Max could even process the **impossible presence before him**, Angie sauntered up beside him, her tail wagging, ears perking as she **locked eyes with the large, knowing dog.**

Borges' ears twitched. His gaze flicked over Angie with intrigue.

"Well hello, angel of the swamp," Borges said smoothly.

Angie, ever delighted by new encounters, wagged her tail and barked in return:

"Well hello to you, visitor from the sea."

Pascal, perched on Álvaro's shoulder, lazily flicked his tail.

Álvaro scratched at his beard, exhaling like a man who already knew this was going to be **another one of those goddamn days.**

Álvaro stepped forward without waiting for an answer.

"May I come in?" he asked, already crossing the threshold.

Max, still dazed from the sheer **improbability** of the situation, stepped aside without protest.

Maria emerged from the bedroom, hair still inexplicably perfect from the **Panacea sleep**, blinking at the sight of the uninvited guest standing in their living room.

Meanwhile, **Angie trotted up to Borges**, tail wagging, exuding hospitality.

"Let me show you around, mister," she said warmly.

Borges, ever the gentleman, nodded in appreciation.

"After you, my dame," he replied smoothly, falling into step beside her as they padded off into the cabin.

Max exhaled and gestured vaguely at the couch.

"Sure... make yourself comfortable."

Álvaro flopped down onto the nearest chair with the energy of a man who had **far too much to deal with** and **far too little patience left to care**.

Maria shot Max an incredulous look, then mouthed, **"What the fuck?"**

A lazy flick of a tail from **Álvaro's shoulder**, and Pascal—who had yet to move from his perch—**narrowed his eyes in perfect agreement**.

"What the fuck indeed," the cat muttered dryly.

Álvaro leaned back in the chair, rubbing his temples as if he had already **had enough of this conversation before it even began.** His sharp eyes flicked between Max and Maria, scanning their **exhausted, slightly traumatized expressions**.

He sighed.

"I must induce you've been dealing with something abnormal," he said, his voice slow, deliberate. *"Beyond your natural predisposition... unwilling."*

He tilted his head, watching them both carefully.

"Am I correct?"

Max stared at him, still unsure whether this was **a real person** or **some kind of post-hurricane hallucination.**

Maria, still standing frozen near the bedroom door, just whispered under her breath:

"Oh, what the fuck."

Pascal **flicked his tail, unimpressed**.

"Oh, they definitely have."

Angie, tail wagging, grinned ear to ear.

*"Oh, they **SOOO** much did **IT**,"* she barked enthusiastically.

Borges perked his ears, tilting his head.

"Did what?"

Pascal let out a slow, judgmental sigh from Álvaro's shoulder.

"Dude," he muttered, shaking his head. *"Wake up."*

Borges blinked. The gears turned. Then, suddenly—

"Oooohhh... duuuude."

Pascal gave a satisfied nod.

"Exactly."

Angie nodded too, her tail thudding happily against the floor.

"Yep."

Max, completely drained, turned to Álvaro, gripping his forehead.

"What do you—"

Maria cut him off, throwing up her hands.

"Oh, come on, he knows. The dogs know. The cat knows. The Seminole dwarf knows."

Max let out a long, defeated sigh.

"Damn it."

Álvaro exhaled deeply, looking around the cabin as if breathing in the full weight of Florida itself.

Then, shaking his head with something that was neither quite amusement nor quite despair, he muttered:

"Ah, Northern Florida… the smell of rotten damp, crystal meth, and inbreeding."

He closed his eyes for a moment, as if appreciating a fine wine.

"So poetic."

Maria groaned. Max rubbed his face. Angie wagged her tail proudly.

Borges sighed.
"He's not wrong."

Pascal, licking a paw, didn't even bother looking up.
"He's never wrong."

Joan Baez and Patti Smith strolled into the cabin, concern etched on their faces.

"You guys all right?" Joan asked, scanning the **strangely silent** Max and Maria.

Before either of them could answer, **Álvaro Diderot stood up**, suddenly embodying a strange, unplaceable air of old-world charm.

He removed a **hat he had never been wearing**, dipped his head slightly, and, with a voice rich like aged cognac, murmured:

"Mes dames... enchanté de voir des vues aussi belles et rêveuses."

Joan Baez, instantly fourteen years old again, let out a tiny, involuntary gasp.

Her hand **fluttered** to her hair, fingers curling a loose strand as she **batted her lashes.**

"He speaks Frrreeench," she whispered, **completely smitten.**

Patti Smith, **who had absolutely not signed up for this**, side-eyed her in pure disbelief.

"Girl, wtf?" she muttered.

Max, still trying to process everything—**the storm, the inexplicable survival, the flashing, the incest, the divine jazz judgment, and now this French-speaking mystery man—**focused on the only thing that made sense to question.

He cleared his throat and turned to Álvaro, squinting.

"You said..." he began carefully, *"that **someone** told you that you have business with me?"*

Álvaro smiled, **pleased with the inquiry**.

"Indeed."

Max exhaled.

"And who that may be?"

Álvaro's **smile widened**, as if he'd been waiting for that exact question. He clapped his hands once, **delighted**.

"Ah! Excellent question."

A pause.

Then, with absolute sincerity, he added:

"You see... I have ***no idea****."*

Max blinked. Maria groaned. Joan Baez was still dreamily lost in the fact that he spoke French.

Angie and Borges exchanged a look.

"Oh, he belongs here," Borges muttered.

Pascal sighed. **"We're doomed."**

Álvaro **stretched lazily**, as if discussing **gruesome doorstep murders** was no more interesting than talking about the weather.

"You see..." he continued, his voice casual, *"it was written on a piece of paper... which happened to be pinned to the back of a man who knocked on my door."*

He **paused for effect**, then added, **almost as an afterthought**:

*"The paper—and, well, the back itself—were **pierced by a dagger**."*

Another **beat of silence**. Then, he shrugged.

"It's becoming a sort of tradition, really—having people die on my doorstep, stabbed to death."

Max and Maria **stared at him in horror**.

Joan Baez, still curling her hair in a lovestruck daze, whispered dreamily, *"So dangerous... so poetic."*

Patti Smith smacked her forehead.

Meanwhile, **Borges turned to Angie**, nodding sagely.

"That's factually true," Borges muttered, matter-of-fact.

Pascal, still draped lazily on Álvaro's shoulder, let out a long, exhausted sigh.

*"At least **don't** sound **proud of it,**"* he hissed.

Max, rubbing his temples: *"A paper… a dead man."*

Maria, blinking in disbelief: *"A dagger…?"*

Before the implications could sink in, the **cabin door swung open again.**

The Seminole dwarf strode in, radiating pure, unapologetic Florida energy.

"Hello everyone!" she announced cheerfully.

Then, **without hesitation**, she **flashed the entire room.**

Max **groaned.** Maria **closed her eyes in silent resignation.** Joan Baez **gasped in delight.** Patti Smith **facepalmed harder.**

"Glad you're all okay!" Seminole added brightly, as if **this was a perfectly normal way to greet people after an apocalyptic hurricane.**

She then **reached for Borges, lifted his paw, and placed it firmly on her breast.**

Borges, **frozen**, looked to Angie in wide-eyed panic.

Angie, giving him the *"seriously?"* look, muttered: *"Dude… already?"*

Borges, stammering:
"I didn't—she did—this was not—"

Pascal **sighed dramatically**, flicking his tail. *"Every damn time."*

Meanwhile, **Álvaro had locked eyes with the Seminole dwarf, something unreadable flickering across his expression.**

After a pause, he murmured:

"I do know you."

Seminole tilted her head, smiling **just enough** to keep things mysterious.

"Mere resemblance," she said, smoothly **dodging the implication.**

Angie narrowed her eyes at **Borges**, her expression a **perfect mix of judgment and disappointment.**

Borges, **panicked**, immediately yanked his paw away from the Seminole's breast, holding it up like a man caught red-pawed at the scene of a crime.

"It was her… I didn't… I swear—"

Angie **shook her head slowly**, exhaling in the **universal sigh of all female beings dealing with male nonsense.**

"Male dogs are all the same."

Seminole, watching the scene with **deep amusement**, casually shrugged.

"He's right, girl," she said to **Angie**, *"I started it."*

Angie **leaned in slightly**, lowering her voice to a **conspiratorial whisper.**

"I know," she muttered, *"but let him feel guilty a bit."*

Seminole, **grinning**, whispered back:

"Oh, sure, sure."

Borges looked between them, completely lost. Pascal, observing everything from **Álvaro's shoulder**, let out a **deep, exhausted sigh.**

"You two are terrifying," he muttered.

Maria, arms crossed, eyes locked onto **Álvaro**, spoke with the **sharpness of a woman utterly done with this entire timeline.**

"Cut the crap."

She pointed directly at him.

"Mister," she said with venom, *"do you have a reason why I fucked my brother like a rabbit on crystal meth?"*

BIG GENERAL GASP.

Joan Baez **fainted into Patti Smith's arms**.
Max **covered his face with both hands**.
Borges **looked at the floor**.
Pascal **looked at the sky**.
Álvaro **sipped someone else's coffee like it wasn't his problem.**

Meanwhile, **all the locals** just shrugged.

"Eh," muttered an old man on the porch, *"Tuesday."*

And then—

The **cabin door swung open once again**, and in **walked Tony Bennett.**

Not a hair out of place. Shoes still **untouched by the sand**. Suit still **defying the humidity of Florida itself.**

He **adjusted his cuffs**, then, in **that smooth, velvet voice that had judged them once before**, he simply sang:

"The best is yet to come, and babe, won't that be fine?"

The **room fell silent.**

Max, **finally at his breaking point**, groaned into his hands:

"Oh, for fuck's sake."

Álvaro, completely unfazed, **leaned back in his chair**, scratching his beard.

"Actually," he said, voice casual, *"I was hoping **you** guys had some answers for **me**."*

Maria's eyes narrowed.

"Answer another question of mine with a question of yours," she growled, *"and I'll find another dagger to pierce you."*

Álvaro **raised an eyebrow** but said nothing. Pascal, still perched on his shoulder, **nodded approvingly.**

"She means it," the cat muttered.

Meanwhile, **Angie turned to Borges**, sensing an opportunity for escape.

"Wanna see the beach?" she asked, tail wagging.

Borges, ever the gentleman, dipped his head slightly.

"Après vous, mademoiselle."

Joan Baez, still blushing, gasped in delight.

*"Even his **dog** speaks French!"* she whispered, **clutching her heart**.

That was Patti Smith's **breaking point. Grabbing Baez by the wrist, she dragged her toward the door.**

*"Girl, we're **getting out of here.**"*

As they fled, Tony Bennett remained, **watching in perfect silence**, his presence still radiating judgment.

But then, **from the corner of the room, a single, well-timed lure appeared.**

Someone (probably the Seminole dwarf) slid out **a glossy black-and-white photograph** of **Cole Porter and Duke Ellington, side by side, deep in conversation, cigars in hand.**

Tony **narrowed his eyes.**

Another **photo appeared**—this time, **Ella Fitzgerald holding a glass of champagne, smiling mid-laughter.**

Tony **tilted his head.**

A final **photo slid onto the table—Frank Sinatra, standing at a piano, talking to Count Basie.**

Tony **exhaled sharply** through his nose, then, without a word, turned and followed the trail of **musical history breadcrumbs** straight out the door.

And just like that, **he was gone.**

Álvaro leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table, and recited the words as if they were nothing more than an annoying riddle someone had left on his doorstep:

"Ὄμνυμι Ἀπόλλωνα ἰητρὸν καὶ Ἀσκληπιὸν καὶ Ὑγείαν καὶ Πανάκειαν καὶ θεοὺς πάντας τε καὶ πάσας ἵστορας ποιεύμενος ἐπιτελέα ποιήσειν κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ κρίσιν ἐμὴν ὅρκον τόνδε καὶ ξυγγραφὴν τήνδε."

He sighed.

"So, I tried my luck and traveled here."

Max, staring blankly: *"Of course it said that."*

(*Inside: WHAT??*)

Maria, nodding slowly, expression utterly unreadable: *"Sure, sure, makes sense."*

(*Inside: WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK???*)

Pascal, licking his paw, muttered dryly:

"Well, at least it wasn't written in blood this time."

Borges, already enjoying the view outside, called back:

"Give it a minute, mon ami, give it a minute."

Álvaro, exhaling deeply, rubbing his temples: *"Yes. And it was written in sperm."*

Maria froze. Blinked. Stared at him.

"How do you—" she started.

Max, without hesitation, without even needing to think, cut her off with a **matter-of-fact nod**:

"It becomes dry and brittle. Every male on the planet knows it."

A **pause.**

Pascal, stretching lazily, **without looking up**:
"True."

A **moment later, Borges trotted in from the beach**, seemingly just to add his voice to the consensus.

"True," he said **casually**—then, **immediately**, turned and headed **right back to Angie.**

Then, **briefly, inexplicably**, Tony Bennett **stepped back into the room, paused just inside the door, and in his eternally smooth, velvet baritone, simply stated:**

"True."

Another beat.

And then, without further explanation, he was lured away once more—this time by a vintage black-and-white photograph of George and Ira Gershwin mid-composition.

Álvaro, nodding sagely, spreading his hands as if to say *"you see?"*:

"Pure Bible."

Maria, arms still crossed, nodded with exaggerated understanding.

"Of course, I totally understood what you said, and I absolutely knew you weren't just clearing your throat."

Then she gestured vaguely at Max, tilting her head with mock innocence.

"But could you translate it for my moron brother here?"

Max, still piecing things together, sat up straighter, his eyes widening slightly.

*"It's the **Hippocratic Oath**,"* he said, voice shifting from hungover disbelief to cautious intrigue. *"It talks about the healing deities… and…"*

His gaze locked onto Álvaro, realization settling in.

"Panacea."

Maria's face went completely blank for two full seconds.

Then, with the perfect expression of "WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK," she slowly turned back to Álvaro.

"This lunatic is onto something, isn't he?"

Álvaro just smiled. Pascal flicked his tail knowingly.

Max, lifting his bourbon like a philosopher raising a glass to the absurdity of life, simply shrugged.

"I am a very well-read debauched guy."

Max, without hesitation, extended his bourbon bottle toward Álvaro, an unspoken bond forming in real-time.

Álvaro, accepting it with a knowing nod:

"Never said no!"

Then, he took a sip.

A very...

Very...

Very...

Long gulp.

Paused.

Then another.

And when he finally **handed the bottle back**, it was **completely empty.**

He let out a satisfied exhale, stretching.

"Aaaah, the salty breeze made me thirsty."

Max, eyes glimmering with newfound admiration:

"My man!"

Maria, looking between them in absolute horror:

"Do I have a second brother?"

Pascal, licking his paw, not even needing to think about it:

"These two were separated at birth, girl."

Max, grinning ear to ear:

"Would you like a burrito?"

Álvaro, **delighted**:

"I would ***love*** *a burrito! Do you have some hot sauce?"*

Max, eyes watering, voice **thick with emotion**:

"I do have hot sauce."

(*Inside:* ***WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL MY LIFE, BRO?!***)

The Beginning of a Beautiful Bromance

Álvaro, with the smooth confidence of a man who **always comes prepared**, reached into his bag and pulled out **a hefty bag of weed**.

He held it up like **a sacred offering**, eyes glinting with mischief.

"Bake some edibles?" he asked casually.

Max, already halfway across the room, **flopped onto the sofa beside him**, immediately throwing an arm

around Álvaro's shoulders like they had been best friends for years in another life.

With deep emotion, he exhaled:

"Álvaro, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful bromance."

Álvaro, without hesitation, pulled him into a firm, one-armed bro-hug, and with a grin, declared:

"Round up the usual suspects!"

Maria, rubbing her temples, suddenly feeling the weight of every decision that led to this moment:

"Why do I suddenly have a headache?"

Pascal, stretching lazily on Álvaro's shoulder, flicked his tail, not even looking at her:

"Welcome to my world, babe."

A couple of hours later...

Angie and Borges strolled back from their beach adventure, tails wagging, their paws still dusted with warm Panacea sand.

They **stepped inside the cabin**, where **chaos and indulgence had fully settled in.**

On the **sofa**, **Max and Álvaro** were wrapped in an **incoherent, blissful stoner embrace**, eyes half-lidded, giggling as they **tried to pour hot sauce onto a burrito without removing the cap.**

Max squinted at the bottle.
"Dude, it's not coming out."

Álvaro, equally perplexed, turning it upside down again:
"Is it clogged? It's gotta be clogged."

Neither had **any intention** of removing the cap, as that would **require too much logic for their current state.**

Meanwhile, **Angie nudged the bedroom door open with her nose.**

And there—**sprawled on the bed, legs wide spread**—lay **Maria**, deep in the throes of pleasure, her body shuddering as **Pascal, perched like a philosopher contemplating the divine**, licked her clit **in what could only be described as pure existential veneration.**

Maria, barely opening her eyes, groaned:
"Doesn't anybody knock in this typhoon-proof cabin?"

Pascal, unbothered, **not even remotely distracted**, continued his **work with the precision of a cat who had already unlocked the mysteries of the universe and found that the meaning of life was right here, between Maria's thighs.**

Maria trembled violently, another orgasm ripping through her—and from the look of things, it was neither the first nor the last.

Angie blinked. Borges tilted his head.

Then, after a beat, Angie wagged her tail.

"Awooo," she said. *("I love Florida.")*

Borges blinked at Angie, tilting his head.

"Awoo?" he asked, ears twitching.

Angie, tail wagging, eyes full of mischief and Florida-born wisdom, nodded.

"Awoo!" she confirmed.

And just like that, they disappeared into the hidden corners of the cabin, finding their own private space to indulge in the true meaning of Panacea—the cure to all of life's troubles.

Meanwhile, back on the **sofa**, **Max and Álvaro** were **still** struggling with the hot sauce dilemma.

Álvaro, squinting at the bottle, took another **deep, philosophical** drag from his joint.

"Maybe..." he said slowly, as if **unveiling the mysteries of the cosmos**, *"it's not coming out... because it's Carolina Reaper... and this is Florida."*

Max, jaw dropping, eyes widening in sheer **stoner enlightenment**:

"Duuuuude."

They **stared at each other**, the weight of this **cosmic truth** settling in.

And outside, the waves of Panacea **rolled in gently, whispering secrets only the enlightened could understand.**

The next morning, breakfast was nothing short of glorious.

Angie and Borges were all over each other, butt-sniffing, nose-booping, and generally radiating post-coital bliss.

Pascal, purring like an engine, nestled into Maria's neck, as she twirled his tail absentmindedly, eyes half-lidded in contentment.

At the center of the chaos, Max and Álvaro were still sitting on the sofa, locked in a battle of pure stoner persistence—attempting, for the second day in a row, to pour Carolina Reaper sauce from a bottle that still had the damn cap on.

Maria, watching them struggle in absolute disbelief, grabbed the bottle, unscrewed the cap with one swift motion, and set it back down.

A few lazy, drunken shakes later, and a single dash of sauce finally hit the stale burrito.

Max stared at it.

Then at Álvaro.

Then back at the burrito.

Then back at Álvaro.

Finally, he exhaled deeply.

"Duuude," Max whispered, in sheer **spiritual wonder**. *"Are we in Carolina now?"*

Álvaro, blinking slowly, processing:

"Duuude..."

Then, **suddenly, alarmed**:

"Wait. You shouldn't have driven in your state!"

Max frowned.

*"Which state? **Florida or Carolina?**"*

Álvaro, eyes widening, brain short-circuiting under the weight of this existential paradox:

"Duuuuude."

Max, now fully embracing the **Florida state of mind**, **tipped the bottle of Carolina Reaper sauce** and **proceeded to absolutely drown his stale burrito** in an **industrial amount of molten hellfire.**

Álvaro, still riding the tail end of last night's high, **watched the reckless act in fascinated horror.**

Max, eyes slightly glazed but focused **just enough** to remember they were technically dealing with a murder mystery, casually muttered:

"So, that stabbed man anyway..."

A **pause.**

Maria, still twirling Pascal's tail, **stopped mid-motion.**

Pascal **opened one eye.**

Borges and Angie, **mid-butt sniff**, froze.

Álvaro, finally snapping out of his burrito-induced trance, **blinked**.

"Ah. Yes. That."

He **leaned back**, scratched his beard, and **took a moment**, as if **realizing how incredibly stupid it was** that they had just spent the last 24 hours **drinking, getting high, having orgies, and failing to open hot sauce bottles while an actual corpse had been left on his doorstep.**

"Right," he finally said. *"So... the man. Stabbed. Dead. Sperm-covered note. Hippocratic Oath. And here I am."*

Max, **now holding what could only be described as a burrito-shaped Carolina Reaper lava bomb**, nodded sagely.

"Duuude."

Maria, rubbing her temples:

"You're telling me that after all this, ***we're just now getting to the dead body?"***

Pascal sighed.

"Welcome to Florida, babe."

Álvaro, in a moment of pure **reckless curiosity**, **slid his finger along Max's lava-drenched burrito**, scooping up a **thick, ominous glob of Carolina Reaper sauce**.

Without hesitation, he **popped his finger into his mouth**.

And **immediately regretted every choice that had ever led him to this moment.**

His **entire body spasmed**.

His **eyes widened** like a man who had just seen the face of **God··· and God was angry.**

With a **violent, involuntary jerk**, he **sprang backward**, **flipping over the sofa**, **hitting the floor**, then **scrambling desperately until his back was pressed flat against the wall**—legs sprawled, arms outstretched, **like a cockroach that had been doused in fire.**

*"HOLY MOTHER OF **SOCRATES** WHAT **IS THAT?!?**"*he wheezed, **eyes watering, throat on fire, soul evacuating his body.**

Max, completely unfazed, took a **big, casual bite** of his burrito, **chewed slowly**, and waved a hand lazily.

*"Relax, dude,"*he said through a mouthful of **death itself**, *"you don't feel the consequences in this place."*

Álvaro, chest heaving, face red, **gripped the wall for support**:

*"BUT I FEEL THE **PREMISES**, FOR PLATO'S SAKE!"*

Maria, arms crossed, eyebrow raised:

*"So he's **partially** sane."*

Pascal, perched on her lap, flicked his tail with **deep skepticism**.

*"Ehh··· **partially at best.**"*

Angie, watching from the floor, **tilted her head**.

"Woof?" (What's happening?)

Borges, tail wagging, **responded enthusiastically.**

"Woof!" (No idea, but it's hilarious!)

Angie, tail wagging, ears perked, looked at **Borges** with a playful glint in her eye.

"Woof?" (Wanna have sex?)

Borges, without hesitation, eyes full of enthusiasm and sheer Florida energy, barked back:

"Woof!" (About time!)

And just like that, they trotted off together, tails wagging in perfect harmony, heading somewhere private for their own Panacea experience.

Maria, rubbing her temples, utterly exhausted by everything happening in this cursed cabin, groaned:

"GUYS. FOCUS."

She turned back to Max and Álvaro, who were both still stoned, dripping in hot sauce sweat, and barely functioning as people.

"THE. STABBED. MAN."

Max, blinking, finally registering what she was talking about.

"Oh right."

Álvaro, still leaning against the wall like a **burnt cockroach**, slowly nodded.

*"Yes. **That guy.**"*

A **beat of silence**.

Pascal, flicking his tail, muttered under his breath:

"This will take all day."

Álvaro, finally peeling himself off the wall, took a deep breath, regaining some **semblance of composure**.

"Right. The stabbed man."

He adjusted his shirt, exhaled, and continued as if he were **explaining a minor bureaucratic nuisance**:

*"Like I said, he knocked on my door. Well, technically, he **collapsed** against my door, **already very much dying**, which was rather inconvenient because I **hadn't had my coffee yet**."*

Maria, eyes narrowing in **utter disbelief**:

*"I'm sorry, are you saying you get so many **stabbed corpses** that it's now just **a mild inconvenience**?"*

Álvaro, completely **deadpan**:

"Yes."

Pascal, licking his paw lazily:

"Can confirm."

Max, leaning in, trying to **make some sense of this mess**:

"Okay, but what did he say before he died?"

Álvaro, pausing for dramatic effect, then mimicking the man's final moments with **perfect accuracy**:

"Not much. Mostly just—"

He **clutched his chest**, staggered a bit, and let out a **deep, guttural death rattle**:

"Ghhhh aaah kwwweerhgh ayayay uugh bljjjrhgh."

Max, blinking.

Maria, pinching the bridge of her nose.

Pascal, looking unimpressed:

"So helpful."

The **front door of the cabin slammed open with violent force**.

The Seminole dwarf burst in, **tits already out**, as if they **had their own sense of urgency in this moment of absolute chaos**.

She cried out, **raw despair in her voice**:

"DUCK YOU SUCKERS!"

And then—

BOOM.

Her entire body erupted.

From behind, a shotgun blast ripped through her torso, sending her insides exploding forward in a grotesque, cinematic arc, cutting her clean in two.

Blood. Bone. Viscera.

The cabin fell into a stunned silence—except for the wet slap of her entrails against the wooden floor.

A beat.

Then—

The cold, mechanical sound of a shotgun being reloaded.

Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk.

And then, a figure stepped into the doorway, shadowed against the daylight, the barrels of the shotgun still smoking.

Slow. Calculated. Deadly.

They levered the shotgun up again.

A pause.

And then—

BOOM.

Both barrels discharged into the cabin.

The **blast ripped through the cabin**, splinters flying, bodies **jerking from impact**—but somehow, miraculously, **no one took a serious hit.**

Sure, some of them were **stung like hell**, and a few had **bruises forming in real time**, but... no deep cuts. No critical wounds.

The only one who came out **completely untouched**?

Angie.

She **stood proudly in the middle of the chaos**, tail wagging, **a single piece of buckshot dramatically frozen mid-air just inches from her fur**, as if **the**

universe itself had decided that she was too pure to be harmed.

"Woof!" she barked happily. *(I'm loving Florida so much right now!)*

The first to react? Max.

He groaned, shifting in place, hands patting his chest, his arms—realizing that yes, he'd been hit, but no actual holes had been put in him.

"Ouch, ouch—" he winced, rubbing his ribs, *"that thing was loaded with coarse salt!"*

He blinked. Salt.

Then he turned to Álvaro, whose expression had shifted from shock to sudden, terrible understanding.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Maria groaned, still catching her breath. *"What now?"*

Álvaro, rubbing his shoulder where he'd taken a particularly brutal shot of salt, sighed deeply.

"It means," he muttered, eyes darkening, *"we're dealing with something that doesn't like being purified."*

Silence.

A slow realization settled over the room.

Something unholy had just entered the game.

The chaos faded into stunned silence.

All eyes turned to the Seminole's body—or rather, the two halves of it, now motionless on the floor.

The charge had been the same.

Salt.

The same painful but non-lethal blast that had peppered them—except hers had been fired at point-blank range.

No chance. No saving her.

Álvaro knelt beside the body, expression unreadable, but something in the lines of his face hinted at recognition, at history, at debts unpaid and stories untold.

He gently reached out, covering her eyes with one hand, then, with the same quiet reverence, draped his other hand over her exposed breasts, a final act of dignity for someone who had, in her own wild and absurd way, been part of this madness.

"Rest now," he muttered, voice low, unreadable.

No one spoke.

Even Pascal remained silent, tail flicking just once, sharply.

Even Angie lowered her head, as if she understood that, this time, things were different.

Max exhaled, rubbing his jaw, staring at the salt-scattered ground.

"Okay," he muttered, voice hoarse. *"What the actual fuck is happening?"*

Pascal, still perched near the **two halves** of the Seminole dwarf, **licked a paw calmly**, the only one completely unfazed by the carnage.

Without looking up, he muttered,

"Are bodies, dead or alive, dropping from the sky?"

Max, blinking, rubbing his bruised ribs, hesitated.

"No..."

Pascal, tail flicking sharply, finally meeting Max's eyes.

"Then thank your little god if you have any," he said dryly, *"and shut up."*

Maria, arms crossed, eyes gleaming, watching Pascal with pure **feral attraction**:

"I have never found him hotter."

Álvaro and Borges, almost in unison, turned their heads **toward the nearest window**, eyes narrowing.

Then they both looked up.

"Better check and be sure," **Álvaro muttered.**

Borges, ears twitching, agreed.

"Always best to be sure."

Max, utterly **lost in his own story**, finally snapped.

"WHAT?"

Meanwhile, **Angie**, still sitting beside Borges, her tail wagging **a little more than usual**, looked up at him with **shining eyes.**

"He is so brave...," she whispered, **breathless.**

Borges, standing a little taller, chest puffed out, wagged his tail proudly.

"I am!" he confirmed, absolutely believing it.

Maria, completely unfazed by the chaos, grabbed the nearest pint of bourbon, unscrewed the cap, and downed a quarter of it in one long, unbroken gulp.

She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, exhaled sharply, then looked at the stoned, bruised, and generally useless men around her.

"Weren't you guys talking about edibles?"

Álvaro, snapping back into focus, suddenly beamed.

"I'm cooking!" he declared, springing to his feet like a man with purpose.

Max, blinking out of whatever existential crisis he had fallen into:

"What now?"

Pascal, flicking his tail, unimpressed, gave Max a **long, slow, judgmental stare.**

"Dude," he said flatly, *"unless you are **Fonzie**, **Doc Emmet Brown**, or **the Pope**, you stay put and do what your sister says."*

Borges, his tail wagging, **nodded enthusiastically.**

"My man!"

Maria, locking eyes with Pascal, her pupils **dark with raw, unhinged attraction**, **scooped him up in a singular, sweeping motion**, **holding him to her chest with pure sexual veneration.**

"I'm taking this to the bedroom," she declared, voice thick with intent.

Then, **with a single, forceful kick**, she **shut the door behind them.**

A **beat of silence**.

Álvaro, already halfway to the kitchen, shrugged.

"Well," he said, pulling out the weed, *"guess I'll bake."*

Max, still staring at the bedroom door, emotionally shattered:

"I need another drink."

Angie, tail wagging, looking up at Borges with unfiltered admiration:

"You're the smartest male here."

Borges, sitting a little taller, smugly nodding:

"I know."

25 to 35 minutes later...

The oven dinged.

Álvaro, wearing an apron he had somehow procured in the meantime (embroidered with *"Kiss the Cook, or Don't, I Don't Care"*), pulled the freshly baked

weed edibles out of the oven, their rich, buttery aroma mingling with the lingering scent of bourbon, Carolina Reaper sauce, and poor life choices.

He set them on the counter to cool.

20 minutes.

The longest 20 minutes of their lives.

Max stared at the tray like a man waiting for divine intervention.

Angie sat obediently, tail thumping against the floor, staring at the edibles with religious devotion.

Borges yawned dramatically and lay down, because cool guys never act desperate, even for edibles.

Pascal, back from his existentially charged bedroom adventure, licked his paw, unimpressed.

Maria, hair slightly disheveled, emerged from the bedroom with the smug aura of a woman who had

seen the mysteries of the cosmos and lived to tell the tale.

She took one look at the scene, the way everyone was silently vibrating with anticipation, and just said:

"We eating or what?"

And so, they ate.

They were deep in it now.

The edibles had hit.

Hard.

Max was slumped on the couch, staring at his hands like they held the answers to the universe.

Álvaro was muttering something about the Platonic forms of burritos, occasionally nodding as if Socrates himself were in the room.

Maria, lying on the floor, giggled, completely convinced the ceiling was breathing.

Angie and Borges were curled up together, their tails thumping lazily against the wooden floor in synchronized cosmic bliss.

And then, in the middle of the hazy, swirling galaxy of THC-induced enlightenment, Borges raised his head and spoke.

"So we are leaving the cut-in-two corpse in the doorstep?"

Silence.

Everyone froze.

The room, which moments ago had been a floating nebula of warmth and peace, suddenly contracted into a singular, horrifying realization.

Max, blinking slowly, took a deep breath.

"Duuuude…" he muttered, his voice **heavy with sudden responsibility.**

Maria, still on the floor, whispered:

"Oh... fuck."

Álvaro, dragging his hands down his face, mumbled:

"I was hoping no one would bring it up."

Pascal, who had not partaken in the edibles and was **fully aware of the absurdity of the situation**, just flicked his tail and sighed.

"You absolute morons."

They **stared** at the corpse.

The **Seminole dwarf**, blasted in half at **point-blank range**, should have left **a crime scene out of a horror movie—blood splattered on the walls, organs dripping off furniture, entrails soaking into the wood.**

But instead…

She just lay there.

Two neat halves.

No **blood.**

No **gore.**

No **intestines hanging out like cursed spaghetti.**

Just… there.

Like **a ragdoll ripped in two.**

It was unnatural. **Too clean.**

The cabin had done this.

Max blinked slowly, still high as a satellite.

"Duuuude…" he whispered, processing the reality of it.

Maria, lying on the floor, **giggled nervously**.

"She looks like a plush toy that lost a fight with a dog."

Pascal, **perched on the armrest, unimpressed**:

"Or maybe the laws of reality here are just as baked as you idiots."

Álvaro, rubbing his temples, **exhaled deeply**.

"I swear to every god in history, Florida is the most metaphysically unstable place on Earth."

Angie, tail wagging, **sniffed the corpse halves, then turned to Borges**:

"Woof?" (Is it still good to eat?)

Borges, **gently horrified**:

"Woof!" (Absolutely not! What the hell, Angie?)

Max, looking at the corpse, then at the rest of them:

"Sooo… do we just… leave it?"

Silence.

Then **Álvaro, Maria, Pascal, Borges, and Angie—all at once**:

"Yes."

Maria, still sprawled on the floor, fingers lazily twirling Pascal's tail, looked up at **Álvaro** with a slow, hazy grin.

"Soooooo, Álvaro..." she drawled, blinking **one eye at a time**.

"Dead body, message in sperm, trip here to Panacea…"

She paused, stretching luxuriously.

"What now?"

Álvaro, still high as a **NASA test flight**, blinked, looked at her, then at the **ripped-in-two-yet-oddly-clean corpse still chilling by the door.**

He sighed dramatically, rubbing his temples like a man who has seen too much and yet not nearly enough.

"Now..." he said slowly, deliberately.

He took a deep breath.

And then, with absolute certainty, he declared:

"Now, I need a fucking drink."

Max, without missing a beat, handed him a bourbon bottle.

Álvaro took it, unscrewed the cap, and chugged.

Borges and Angie, curled up together, exchanged a knowing glance.

"Woof," said Borges. *(Here we go again.)*

"Woof," Angie agreed, tail wagging. *(I love Florida.)*

Álvaro, now slightly less high but still vibing on bourbon and metaphysical nonsense, took a **long, slow exhale.**

He sat up straight, cracked his neck, and looked around at the **assembled band of lunatics, animals, and accidental metaphysical explorers.**

"Alright."

He rubbed his hands together, like a man about to **explain quantum physics to a room of drunk kindergartners.**

"Let's go over this one more time."

He **gestured vaguely** toward the **two neatly separated halves of the Seminole dwarf, still lying on the floor like an abandoned prop.**

"Dead body shows up on my doorstep, stabbed, bleeding, and—most memorably—covered in a message written in sperm."

He **paused, letting that sink in.**

Max nodded **solemnly**, as if this was **normal conversation.**

Maria sipped bourbon and **shrugged**.

Pascal muttered, *"Still not over it."*

Álvaro continued:

*"The message, written in ancient Greek, was the **Hippocratic Oath**, which specifically calls upon healing deities… including one in particular: **Panacea**."*

He **leaned forward**, locking eyes with Max and Maria.

"And where did I find you two?"

Max blinked, putting the dots together.

"Panacea…" he murmured.

Álvaro **snapped his fingers, pointing at him** like a teacher whose dumbest student had just answered a question correctly.

*"**Bingo.**"*

He took another sip of bourbon, then **gestured dramatically** toward the cabin walls.

*"This place. **This whole goddamn town.** It's not just called **Panacea.** It **is** Panacea. A real, living, self-contained cure to all things—**pain, consequences, mortality.**"*

Max and Maria **looked at each other**, **slowly realizing** what he was saying.

Álvaro **continued**:

"And that's why reality here is… let's say… loose. Why the cabin protects you. Why Angie and Borges are basically immortal. Why you two can—"

He **paused**, eyeing them both.

Maria **raised an eyebrow**.

"Finish that sentence, and I will push another dagger through your skull."

Álvaro **smiled innocently** and sipped his bourbon instead.

Pascal **rolled his eyes.**

"Anyway," Álvaro went on, **ignoring Maria's homicidal threats**, *"someone out there knew this. Someone sent me here. That dead man? He either knew something or was trying to stop something. Either way, he died making sure I came here. To you."*

Max, now blinking **a little faster**, sat up straighter.

"Why us?"

Álvaro shrugged, grinning **just enough to be dangerous**.

"Well, that's the fun part, isn't it?"

A beat of silence.

Then Borges, casually lounging near Angie, yawned and muttered:

"This is gonna get weird, isn't it?"

Pascal, flicking his tail, deadpan:

"Oh, it's already there, mon ami."

Max, rubbing his face as the reality (or lack thereof) settled in, exhaled slowly.

"Okay, so let's recap. You get a ***corpse on your doorstep****, stabbed, with a* ***Greek sperm note*** *referencing* ***Panacea****, and instead of—oh, I don't know—calling the police like a normal person, you follow some mystical breadcrumb trail here, where we just happen to live in a* ***supernatural no-consequences zone of Florida****?"*

Álvaro, tipping his bourbon bottle in acknowledgment:

"Correct."

Maria, pouring herself another drink:

*"And now, reality is breaking apart and something—**someone**—out there **wanted you to come here. To us."*

Álvaro, swirling the bourbon in his glass:

"Also correct."

Max, nodding **slowly**:

"This all tracks."

Pascal, blinking in disbelief:

"No, it does not. None of this tracks."

Álvaro, ignoring Pascal's logic, leaned forward, his voice lowering slightly.

"Look, it gets better—or worse, depending on your outlook."

He gestured toward the **Seminole dwarf's oddly bloodless corpse**.

*"She was shot with **salt**. You all were. Salt is used for purification, right? Warding off evil, cleansing the unclean."*

He gave them a **significant look**.

"And yet… she was the only one it actually killed."

Silence.

Angie stopped wagging her tail. Borges sat up straighter. Maria stopped mid-sip.

Max, **processing**: *"You're saying she wasn't… clean?"*

Álvaro nodded, **pleased that at least one of them was catching on.**

"Or," he said, **leaning back**, *"she was something… unnatural. Something that wasn't supposed to be here."*

Maria **gestured wildly at their surroundings**:

*"Dude, we are all unnatural. My dog **talks.** My cat **performs cunnilingus.** My brother—"*

She stopped herself, shaking her head.

*"Never mind. The point is, **this place** makes no goddamn sense."*

Álvaro shrugged.

*"Maybe this place is **exactly why** she wasn't supposed to be here. Maybe she was an **intruder** in something bigger."*

Max, eyes narrowing:

"Okay, but then who shot her?"

Álvaro tapped the side of his glass, thinking.

"Someone who knew ***what she was****. And someone who knew that if they came after her, they'd have to come here."*

Maria folded her arms.

"And you have no idea who that someone is?"

Álvaro grinned, a little too amused for someone sitting in a hurricane-proof incest cabin with **a talking cat, two semi-immortal dogs, and a neatly bisected woman.**

"Not yet."

A beat of silence.

Then, from outside the cabin—

A **single, heavy knock at the door.**

Borges and Angie **immediately snapped to attention.**

Pascal's fur **bristled.**

Max and Maria **froze.**

Álvaro, grinning, **reached for his bourbon again.**

"Well, that didn't take long."

Max, still **very much high** but now **armed with a newfound sense of existential responsibility**, **stumbled to the door**.

He **paused for a second**, staring at the handle, **because deep down, he knew nothing good ever started with a knock on the door in this cabin.**

Then, taking a deep breath, he **swung it open.**

And there, **standing in the doorway**, was…

A **man**.

Tall. **Weathered.**

Dressed in **a dark suit that had seen better days**, with **a crisp white shirt undone at the collar**, as if he

had once cared about appearances but had long since stopped giving a damn.

A **scar ran down his cheek**, disappearing under the stubble of a **three-day beard**.

In his right hand, he held **a shotgun**, still faintly smelling of **gunpowder and salt.**

His **gray eyes flicked over Max**, then **past him, scanning the room.**

A pause.

Then, his voice—gravelly, measured, completely unimpressed with whatever level of hell this was:

"Alright. Which one of you dumbasses fucked with the natural order?"

Without hesitation.

Every single person, cat, and dog in the room—

Álvaro.

Maria.

Pascal.

Borges.

Angie.

All of them pointed at Max.

Max, mouth still slightly open from the shock of seeing a shotgun-wielding, salt-blasting stranger on his doorstep, slowly turned to glare at them.

"Wow."

The man in the doorway exhaled sharply, shaking his head.

"Figures."

He lowered the shotgun slightly, but not entirely, because clearly, this was a situation where keeping a loaded weapon within reach still seemed like a wise decision.

Max, still **processing the absolute betrayal** from his so-called loved ones, turned back to the man and cleared his throat.

"Uh… could you, like… be more specific? Because, like, there's been a lot of fucking with things lately."

The man squinted at him.

"You brought something here. Or let something in. Either way, this place is compromised."

Max blinked.

"Compromised how?"

The man gestured toward the **perfectly bisected, oddly bloodless corpse still chilling on the floor like a forgotten yoga mat.**

"For starters, that's not supposed to be possible."

Álvaro, **sipping his bourbon, unbothered**:

"Welcome to Florida, my friend."

The man **eyed him briefly**, then turned his gaze **back to Max.**

"You. Start talking. Now."

Max, **sweating despite the cabin's perfect lack of humidity, looked around desperately.**

Maria **gestured encouragingly.**

*"Yeah, **go on, Max,**"* she said, **smirking like a traitor.** *"Explain yourself."*

Pascal, **lazily grooming a paw:**

"We're all waiting."

Borges, **wagging his tail like this was the best show he'd ever seen:**

"This is gonna be good."

Angie, **leaning against Borges, full-on enjoying the drama:**

"Awooo." (Translation: "I love Florida.")

Max sighed, **mentally preparing himself**, then looked back at the man in the doorway.

"Alright, dude. You might want to sit down."

The man's expression **did not change.**

"Not a chance in hell."

Max shrugged.

"Okay, then at least take a drink, because this is gonna get weird."

Álvaro, already halfway to the liquor cabinet, held up a bottle.

"He's not wrong."

CRACK.

A **single sniper shot** rang through the air.

The man at the door **jerked slightly**, his head snapping forward—**and then backward** as a **perfectly clean bullet hole** appeared **right between his eyes**.

No blood. No brain matter.

Just a **neat little entry wound**… and an equally **neat little exit wound.**

His body **swayed for half a second**, as if it were **still debating whether to acknowledge being dead**—then **collapsed forward into the doorway** with **an unceremonious thud.**

Silence.

Everyone just… **stared.**

Borges slowly blinked. **"Awoo?"** *(Did that just happen?)*

Angie, **tilting her head**: **"Awoo!"** *(Again? Already?)*

Álvaro, sighing deeply, rubbed his face, then exhaled, waving his drink vaguely at the scene.

"So, this whole 'dying on doorsteps' thing really needs a celebration festival…"

Max, still in absolute disbelief:

"Dude, are we under attack?"

Maria, **taking a sip of bourbon, completely unbothered**:

"Or is this just, like… normal for you guys?"

Pascal, flicking his tail, muttered:

"At this point, I don't even have a joke for it."

Max, cautiously **nudging the fresh corpse with his foot**:

"Okay, what the actual fuck?"

Álvaro took another **long, slow sip** of his drink.

"Well, Max, you were about to explain everything."

He **gestured at the newly deceased, bullet-hole-ridden man in the doorway.**

"But apparently, someone really didn't want him to hear it."

Borges and Angie, **ears perked, suddenly alert**, both **looked toward the treeline.**

Borges: **"Woof."** *(We're not alone.)*

Angie: **"Awoo."** *(I love Florida.)*

Álvaro, still staring at the freshly shot corpse, suddenly had **a full-body epiphany.**

His eyes widened.

He **took a deep breath**, then whispered in **pure revelation**:

"Wait a minute… I saw a king!"

Everyone else, blinking in confusion:

"He seen what?"

Álvaro, **still caught in the divine moment of enlightenment, his voice shaking with meaning**:

"Ho visto un re!"

A beat.

And then—

EVERYONE IN THE ROOM IMMEDIATELY CLICKED INTO PLACE.

They all nodded in understanding, their bodies vibrating with the collective power of Dario Fo.

And, as if possessed by the very spirit of absurdity itself, they sang in perfect unison:

"Ah, beh; sì, beh!"

And then it fully took off.

Max, Maria, Álvaro, Pascal, Borges, and Angie—all in unison, as if they had rehearsed this in a past life:

"Ho visto un re!"
"– Sa l'ha vist cus'è?"

"– Ha visto un re!"

"– Ah, beh; sì, beh."

Maria, now **fully committed to the bit**, grabbed Pascal and **spun him dramatically like a tango partner.**

Max **picked up Borges and twirled him in the air.**

Álvaro **stood on the couch like a revolutionary leader, arms spread wide, still seeing THE KING.**

The **shotgun victim, still very much dead in the doorway, contributed absolutely nothing to the performance.**

But did that stop the **cabin of maniacs?**

Absolutely not.

They **continued, fully derailed, fully possessed, fully Italian.**

"Un re che piangeva seduto sulla sella,"

"Piangeva tante lacrime, ma tante che…"

"Bagnava anche il cavallo!"

Borges, now completely swept up in the hysteria, barked:

"POVERO RE!"

Angie, howling in euphoric Floridian madness:

"E POVERO ANCHE IL CAVALLO!"

"Sì, beh; ah, beh!"
"Sì, beh; ah, beh!"

The cabin shook with the unholy energy of a Dario Fo Renaissance taking place in a crime scene.

The corpse remained still.

The sniper, whoever they were, probably reloading outside, now had to reckon with the fact that their

target's associates were singing 1970s Italian political satire instead of dealing with his death.

And that?

That was on them.

And then—as if the sheer absurdity of reality had finally caved in on itself—

DARIO FO APPEARED.

In full jester costume.

Hat with bells. Tunic flowing.

He stood in the doorway of the hurricane-proof incest cabin, looking at the scene before him—the corpse, the stoned people, the singing dog, the smug cat, the two halves of a Seminole woman still chilling on the floor—and smiled.

A fool's smile. A knowing smile.

And then, with a theatrical flourish, he began to dance.

A carnival whirl, a folly-jolly chaos, his feet kicking up the sand as he spun, twirled, and beckoned them forth like a Pied Piper of Holy Madness.

And they followed.

Like Death leading the dance in Bergman's *Seventh Seal*—**but joyful, but riotous, but electric with absurd power—**Dario Fo led them onto the dunes.

And together, as one wild, unstoppable force of history, nonsense, and defiance, they sang with him:

"E sempre allegri bisogna stare!"
"Che il nostro piangere fa male al re!"
"Fa male al ricco e al cardinale!"
"Diventan tristi se noi piangiam!"

The waves crashed against the shore, roaring with them.

The wind howled, but it was drowned by their voices.

Even the sniper, wherever they were, hesitated—because how the fuck do you shoot a man in a jester costume leading a political satire musical on the dunes?

Max threw an arm around Álvaro's shoulders.

Maria held Pascal like a sacred relic.

Borges and Angie ran circles around them, barking and howling in rhythmic ecstasy.

And Dario Fo, eternal, everlasting, untouchable in his absurd wisdom, laughed and laughed and laughed.

Because this was the only way to win.

Because if you laugh at the world hard enough, it has no power over you.

And so they sang.

And so they danced.

And the world, for one glorious moment, made no sense at all.

They stumbled back to the cabin, exhausted, delirious, still buzzing from the mad dance led by Dario Fo.

Their feet ached, their lungs burned, their souls felt stretched beyond mortal limits, yet they laughed, still drunk on the absurdity of it all.

But as they approached the cabin, the laughter slowly faded.

Because the man with the bullet hole through his skull—the one who had collapsed in their doorway, stiff as a board, dead as anything could be—

was gone.

Not a trace of him remained.

And yet, somehow, that wasn't even the strangest part.

Because there, where the two halves of the Seminole dwarf had once been, was…

A whole woman.

She was no longer a dwarf, but still small—petite, delicate, with raven-black hair cascading down her back, wrapped in an elegant black dress.

And she was standing in the middle of the room, completely composed, as if she had never been shot in half, never died at all.

And she was singing.

A deep, soulful voice, rich with history, defiance, and fate itself—

"Noooooo, rien de rien…"

Her voice rolled through the cabin, echoing against the walls.

"Noooooo, je ne regrette rien…"

Max, Maria, Álvaro, Pascal, Borges, and Angie stood frozen.

Because they knew this song.

They all knew it.

Edith Piaf. The song of no regrets. The song of wiping the past clean. The song of rebirth.

And the woman—no longer a dwarf, no longer a corpse—

sang it like she meant it.

Álvaro, gripping his now-warm bourbon bottle, whispered under his breath:

"Well. That's new."

Pascal, watching the scene unfold, flicked his tail and muttered:

"I need stronger drugs."

Angie tilted her head:

"Woof?" (I love France!)

Borges nodded approvingly:

"Woof!" (I really, really do!)

Max stared at the woman, then at Álvaro, then at Maria.

Then he poured himself the biggest drink of his life.

They stared.

Because now that they were looking closer at the woman—at her delicate yet unbreakable frame, at the fire burning behind those small, dark eyes, at the posture of someone who had lived, lost, and sang her defiance into the world—

They realized.

It was her.

"Her."

La Môme.

In bone and flesh.

The myth. The legend. The voice that had survived war, love, death, and rebirth.

Édith. Fucking. Piaf.

And she continued singing, eyes half-closed, lost in the music that had defied all time and space:

"Ni le bien qu'on m'a fait…"
"Ni le mal…"
"Tout ça m'est bien égal."

Maria grabbed the nearest bottle and took a long, steadying gulp.

Max, wheezing, whispered to Álvaro:

"Dude, I think we got haunted by the best possible ghost."

Álvaro, rubbing his temples, still processing what the actual hell was happening:

"Dude, I think reality is drunker than we are."

Pascal, licking his paw, muttered:

"I mean… we did summon Dario Fo. Maybe the universe just gave up and went full French."

Borges and Angie, however, were absolutely thrilled.

"Woof!" (I love France so much!)

"Awoooo!" (I do too!)

Édith Piaf—alive? reborn? resurrected? did it even matter?—finished her verse with the same untouchable defiance she had carried in life.

Then she lowered her gaze to them, smiled just a little, and, with the rasp of a voice that had carried through history itself, she spoke.

"Alors…" she said, with the confidence of a woman who had already seen heaven, hell, and everything in between.

"What the fuck is all this?"

Angie and Borges, tails wagging, eyes shining with the pure ecstasy of absurdity, trotted forward without hesitation.

Each took one of her hands in their paws.

Borges on the left, Angie on the right.

And together, they led her back into the song, their voices—barks, howls, and legendary human rasp—blending into a choir of absolute defiance.

And Piaf, never one to shy away from a moment of grand drama, lifted her chin and sang along.

Her voice, weathered by life but eternal, carried over them all.

As if the very air had been waiting for her to break the silence of the universe once again.

Borges and Angie howled in harmony as she sang:

"Le ciel bleu sur nous peut s'effondrer"
"Et la Terre peut bien s'écrouler"

Max, eyes wide, chest tight, feeling the weight of history itself, grabbed Maria's hand.

Maria squeezed back, eyes glistening with something close to religious awe.

Álvaro, leaning against the kitchen counter, took a deep swig of bourbon and let it wash over him.

Piaf's voice rang through the cabin, through the air, through time.

"Peu m'importe si tu m'aimes"
"Je me fous du monde entier"

The wind outside the cabin roared, but it wasn't a storm—it was an answer.

Something greater than them all, something vast, something infinite, was listening.

The universe itself seemed to pause.

And Piaf, with a fire in her eyes that had burned through wars and sorrow and triumphs and resurrections, let it all out.

"Tant qu'l'amour inondera mes matins"
"Tant qu'mon corps frémira sous tes mains"

Max, grinning, feeling high in a way that had nothing to do with the edibles, threw his arms around Álvaro.

"Dude, this is the most metal moment of my life."

Álvaro laughed, shaking his head, watching the scene unfold in surreal beauty.

"Brother, this is beyond metal. This is divine."

Piaf swayed, spinning, lifting her arms as Borges and Angie howled beneath her.

"Peu m'importe les problèmes"
"Mon amour, puisque tu m'aimes"

The room exploded into song, into life, into history itself refusing to sit still.

Pascal, from Maria's arms, flicked his tail and muttered, just loud enough to be heard over the rapture of it all:

"Now this? This is how you break reality properly."

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Tallahassee, for Its Own Citizens:

We know you didn't understand a thing of all the above.

Don’t worry.

Don’t try and make the effort.

Just **smoke your crack**, **sniff your shoemaker glue**, **sit back and relax**.

Everything’s fine.

Florida is still Florida.

Édith Piaf, radiant in her **otherworldly defiance**, took **Álvaro by the hand**, her grip light but firm, her voice a siren call from beyond history itself.

"Allez, venez Milord," she purred, a knowing smile flickering across her lips.

And without hesitation, she **led him through the dunes, toward the palm trees swaying under the Florida sky.**

The others followed.

Max and Maria.
Pascal, perched smugly on Maria's shoulder.
Angie and Borges, tails high, sniffing the air like they already knew what was coming.

They walked as if enchanted, as if the path had already been written long before they took a single step.

And then—behind a lone, wind-bent palm tree—

There he was.

Kneeling.

A sniper rifle balanced in his gloved hands.

His crown askew, his expression frozen in the awkwardness of being caught mid-assassination.

The man.

The monarch.

King Charles III.

Álvaro stared, blinking, then threw his hands up in absolute vindication.

"I TOLD YOU I SAW A KING!"

Charles III, fumbling to hide his rifle behind his royal robes, cleared his throat with all the grace of a man caught in extreme embarrassment.

"Ehm, ehm··· ah beh, si beh?" he muttered, as if unsure whether that was the right thing to say.

Silence.

Then, from behind Álvaro, Borges slowly wagged his tail and whispered:

"Awoo?" (Did we just catch the King of England committing a murder?)

Angie, eyes wide:

"Awoo." (I think we did!)

Pascal, licking his paw:

"You know, this actually explains a lot."

Max, **crossing his arms, nodding at Charles**:

"Alright, Your Majesty. What the actual fuck?"

King Charles III, still awkwardly kneeling behind the palm tree, **visibly blushed.**

A **deep, royal crimson.**

He looked at the **assembled group—Max, Maria, Álvaro, Pascal, Borges, Angie, and, most disturbingly, Édith Piaf—** and let out a long, suffering sigh.

Then, with **the weary reluctance of a man who has spent his whole life avoiding explanations but now finds himself with no escape**, he muttered:

"Right, well... ahem... this is a bit awkward, isn't it?"

No one answered.

Just **staring.**

Heavy silence.

Even the **waves seemed to pause, waiting.**

Charles cleared his throat, adjusted his crown, and finally spilled it.

"I was sent here," he admitted, shifting uncomfortably, *"by the **Royal Order of the Eternal Throne.**"*

Max, blinking:

"The who now?"

Charles, sighing:

"It's a... well, a secret society. Of royals. Of course."

Maria **rubbed her temples**.

"Of course," she muttered.

Charles, gesturing vaguely at the air, continued:

"Look, the thing is... the British Crown has always had access to, shall we say... ***hidden knowledge.****"*

Álvaro, arms crossed, intrigued:

"Go on."

"Well," Charles hesitated, then plowed ahead, *"Panacea isn't just a town. It's an... anomaly. A place outside of time and consequence. A place of... well, let's call it 'divine loopholes.'"*

"Yeah, we got that part," Pascal deadpanned.

"Yes, well," Charles coughed, *"this place has been...* ***interfering*** *with things. It wasn't supposed to be* ***active*** *anymore."*

Maria, narrowing her eyes:

"Anymore?"

Charles looked even more uncomfortable.

*"The Royal Order... well... **we may have sealed Panacea away centuries ago** to prevent reality from... well, unraveling."*

Max, blinking in **stoned horror**:

*"Bro. Did we just accidentally **reboot** a supernatural **glitch in the universe?**"*

Charles, avoiding eye contact:

"Ahem... possibly."

Álvaro **nodded slowly, taking this in, then pointed at the sniper rifle.**

"And the shooting?"

Charles **visibly cringed.**

*"Ah, yes... well... technically my mission was to ensure that **certain elements** didn't, erm... continue existing in this space."*

Maria, scowling:

*"Certain elements like... what? Like **us**?"*

Charles, **flushing deeper**:

*"Well, **not you personally,** but, erm... yes. Anyone who might **make things worse.**"*

Silence.

Then **Borges** muttered to **Angie**:

"Awoo?" (Did the King of England just try to kill our new friend?)

Angie, **nodding**:

"Awoo." (Looks like it!)

Édith Piaf, who had been **calmly listening this whole time**, **finally stepped forward, still holding Álvaro's hand.**

She looked **Charles III directly in the eyes** and, in **a voice full of centuries of French contempt for the British monarchy**, whispered:

"Vous êtes un imbécile."

Charles **turned an even deeper shade of red.**

Max, clapping his hands together:

*"Alright, new plan. Let's get **super, super drunk** and process this absolute nightmare of a situation."*

Álvaro **grinned**.

"Brother, that is the best idea you've had all day."

And with that, they turned back toward the cabin.

Charles hesitated, still kneeling behind the palm tree.

Max turned, raised an eyebrow.

"Dude. Are you coming or what?"

Charles **sighed heavily, slung his sniper rifle over his shoulder, adjusted his crown... and followed them.**

Édith Piaf, the spirit of defiance itself, threw back her head and began to sing.

Loud. Powerful. Unrelenting.

"Ah! Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira!"
"Les aristocrates à la lanterne!"

Her voice rang through the night, echoing across the dunes like a prophecy spoken by revolution itself.

Charles froze, his blood draining faster than the British economy post-Brexit.

"Ah! Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira!"
"Les aristocrates on les pendra!"

And mid-song, with the theatrical timing only a woman who had been dead for decades could master, she produced a machete from thin air.

A goddamn machete.

Where had it come from? **No one knew.**

Why did she have it? **Because she was Édith Fucking Piaf.**

With **one elegant, swift, merciless gesture**, she **arched the blade through the humid Florida air**—

—**and Charles III's head was no longer attached to his body.**

His royal, slightly wrinkled head rolled dramatically toward the group, bumping softly against Max's foot.

A **beat of silence.**

Everyone just **stared.**

Even Pascal, **who had seen many, many strange things in his life, had to take a moment to process.**

Meanwhile, Piaf, **without missing a single note, continued her song—**

"Les aristocrates on les pendra!"

"Et quand on les aura tous pendus!"

She kicked Charles' head toward the sea, sending it bouncing down the sand like an old football.

"On leur fichera la paille au cul!"

Max, blinking, voice completely deadpan:

"So. That just happened."

Álvaro, taking a very, very long sip of bourbon:

"Vive la France."

Maria, watching Charles' lifeless body crumple into the sand:

"So, do we… like… bury him? Or do we just let nature do its thing?"

Pascal, sighing:

"I vote we pretend we never met him."

Borges, eyes **sparkling with admiration, turned to Angie.**

"Awoo?" (Is it possible to fall in love with a dead Frenchwoman?)

Angie, **equally starstruck**:

"Awoooo." (It absolutely is!)

Édith Piaf, **wiping the blood from her machete onto the sand, turned to them, expression unreadable.**

Then she **grinned.**

"Alors," she said, adjusting her black dress.

"Who's up for another song?"

Édith Piaf, eternal queen of defiance, reached into the infinite abyss of theatrical absurdity and produced…

A bundle of straw.

And a canister of gasoline.

From nowhere.

Like a magician of the revolution.

The group watched in stunned silence as she hummed along to her own song, casually drenching the straw in gasoline.

Max, eyes wide: *"Dude… is she…?"*

Álvaro, taking another very necessary swig of bourbon: *"Brother, she absolutely is."*

Maria, whispering: *"I love her."*

Piaf crouched beside Charles' corpse, humming sweetly, the machete now resting over one shoulder like a farmer inspecting a harvest.

With the grace of a woman who had lived through war and had no patience for monarchy, she shoved the gasoline-soaked straw directly up Charles' royal rectum.

Deep. Firm. Revolutionary.

Then, with a completely serene expression, she produced a match, struck it against the blade of the machete, and—

FWOOOM.

The King of England's ass was on fire.

And Piaf, with absolute passion, triumph, and unshaken resolve, sang louder:

"Et quand on les aura tous pendus!"
"On leur fichera la paille au cul!"

Charles' corpse twitched slightly, as if even in death, he was aware that this was a bad look for the monarchy.

The flames roared to life, casting unholy shadows on the dunes.

Max, blinking rapidly, turned to Álvaro.

"We're accomplices to regicide, aren't we?"

Álvaro, already halfway through another drink:

"Brother, at this point, I think we're accomplices to a divine cosmic event."

Pascal, watching the flames reflect in Piaf's eyes, muttered:

"You have to respect the commitment."

Borges, completely entranced, turned to Angie with pure, desperate admiration:

"Awoo?" (Can I marry her?)

Angie, equally hypnotized:

"Awooo." (Only if I do first!)

And Édith Piaf, the immortal voice of rebellion, the spirit of Paris, the embodiment of defiance, threw her head back and laughed.

Because history had never felt so alive.

Back at the cabin…

Nobody spoke.

Nobody *could* speak.

It was just downing edibles by the handful and bourbon by the pint.

Humans.
Animals.
The ghost of Édith Piaf.

Everyone was just shoveling intoxicants into their bodies in a desperate attempt to process what had just happened.

Max, mouth full of brownie, eyes glazed over: *"We… we set the King of England's ass on fire."*

Álvaro, washing down an entire weed cookie with a long pull of bourbon: *"Yes. Yes, we did."*

Maria, **stuffing another edible into her mouth without chewing**: *"And we sang while we did it."*

Pascal, **taking a slow lick of a whiskey-soaked paw**: *"It was theatrical regicide."*

Borges, **his snout buried in a half-eaten pot brownie**: *"Awoo?" (Do you think Scotland will give us medals?)*

Angie, **taking a dainty sip from a whiskey glass balanced between her paws**: *"Awooo." (They should.)*

Édith Piaf, reclining dramatically on the couch, **drunk, high, and looking thoroughly pleased with herself**:

"Alors…" she murmured, tossing an edible into her mouth. *"What's next?"*

Max, mouth half full, wheezing:

"Lady, I don't even know what past was anymore, let alone next."

A long silence.

Everyone just… sat.

Drinking.
Eating.
Processing.

Somewhere in the background, jazz was playing, because the universe itself had apparently decided this was a noir film now.

Then, a knock on the door.

A very, very firm knock.

Everyone froze mid-chew.

Pascal sighed, flicking his tail.

"Well, I suppose we should see who's trying to kill us this time."

Everyone turned to Max.

Max, halfway through a brownie, mid-sip of bourbon, mouth still slightly open, slowly looked up.

"Oh, come on," he groaned.

Maria, chewing lazily, unbothered: *"You're the designated door opener, bro."*

Álvaro, nodding sagely: *"It's tradition now."*

Pascal, stretching luxuriously: *"And we respect tradition."*

Borges, wagging his tail: *"Awoo!" (You got this!)*

Angie, still sipping whiskey: *"Awooo." (Go get 'em, tiger.)*

Édith Piaf, lounging on the couch like a Parisian queen, gestured vaguely with her whiskey glass:

"Allez, mon garçon, ouvre la porte… et prépare-toi à la folie."

Max, **groaning loudly, dragging himself to his feet**:

"You all suck."

He **stumbled toward the door**, still **buzzing from bourbon and edibles**, muttering to himself:

"It's always me, Max, go open the door, Max, get shot at, Max, deal with the supernatural bullshit, Max, watch the King of England's flaming ass roll down the beach… Max, Max, Max."

He **reached the door.**

Paused.

Took a deep breath.

Then—**flung it open.**

And there, standing in the doorway, was…

A **man.**

A **man in a Vatican cassock.**

Long. **Black. Elegant.**

A gold cross gleaming against his chest.

His face sharp as a blade, expression unreadable, eyes dark as the abyss.

He lifted one gloved hand.

And in a low, measured voice, he said:

"Signore Max··· we need to talk about Panacea."

Silence.

Max, slow blinking, still high as hell, processing this new information at the speed of molasses.

Then, without turning his head, he called back to the others inside:

"Guys··· I think the Pope sent a hitman."

Max opened the door.

And there stood a man.

Not just any man.

A man in a Vatican cassock.

Except…

The Vatican did not exist anymore.

Because Álvaro and company had erased it from reality.

And yet, this man was here.

Tall. Pale. Dressed in black, with a golden cross gleaming against his chest.

His face was sharp, his eyes dark as the void of uncreation, and his presence did not belong to this plane of existence.

He lifted one gloved hand.

And in a voice that carried the weight of something that should not be, he said:

"Signore Max… we need to talk about Panacea."

Silence.

Max **froze.**

His brain, **drenched in bourbon and THC, struggled violently to connect thoughts.**

His mouth **opened and closed once.**

Then, **without turning his head**, he called back into the cabin:

"Guys… I think we pissed off something that shouldn't exist."

Inside, immediate chaos.

Maria **spit out her drink.**

Pascal, **ears flattened**: *"Oh, for fuck's sake—"*

Álvaro, **deadpan, not even looking up from his glass**: *"Of course. Of course. Why wouldn't reality collapse again?"*

Borges and Angie, **tails down, ears up, staring at the doorway in raw instinctual unease.**

Édith Piaf, **coolly swirling her whiskey**, eyed the Vatican-looking man with **pure French disdain** and muttered:

"Non… ça, c'est nouveau." (Now this is new.)

Back at the door…

Max, **slowly blinking**, trying to form words:

"Uh. Bro. Vatican's kinda… you know… gone."

The **not-Vatican man** tilted his head.

A slow, cold smile crept over his lips.

"Exactly."

And then—

Lightning struck the beach behind him.

The **air bent.**

And **Max realized they were in some deep, deep shit.**

The Vatican Man Stepped Forward.

The air **around him didn't feel right.**

It wasn't **cold.**

It wasn't **hot.**

It was **wrong.**

Max felt it in his bones.

Behind him, **the others were silent. Watching. Waiting.**

The man in the **black cassock** stood tall, calm, completely **unshaken by reality itself being a mess.**

He folded his **gloved hands** in front of him.

Then, in a voice **as smooth as polished obsidian**, he spoke:

"You are correct, Signore Max. The Vatican is gone."

His **eyes did not blink.**

"Destroyed. Erased. Annihilated from history itself."

He took **a step forward.**

Max **took a step back.**

"And yet… here I am."

Silence.

The **cassocked figure continued.**

"You see, gentlemen…"

He **lifted a hand**, gesturing around them, to **Panacea itself.**

"This place. This unnatural ***wound in reality****… It has done something. It has become something. Something* ***dangerous****."*

Max, **eyes darting toward Á**lvaro:

"Dude. Does this sound familiar?"

Álvaro, **finally standing up, drink still in hand, exhaled heavily**:

*"I have lived through some **seriously** cosmic bullshit… but this is next level."*

The **Vatican Man smirked.**

"Ah, Professor Diderot. I had a feeling you would understand."

Max, **gesturing vaguely**:

*"Okay, cool, he knows your name, **hate that**."*

The Vatican Man **folded his hands behind his back, unbothered.**

"The destruction of the Vatican," he continued, *"was not simply the fall of an institution. It was the **breaking of an anchor.**"*

His **dark eyes flicked up.**

"You see, the Church was not just a seat of power. It was a keystone. It held reality in place. Without it… cracks have begun to form."

Maria, leaning against the kitchen counter, taking a slow, measured sip of bourbon:

"Cracks, huh? Gimme a real-world example."

The Vatican Man smiled.

And pointed at Édith Piaf.

Who was still reclining on the couch, drinking whiskey, very much alive despite being very much dead for decades.

"Exhibit A."

The room went still.

Max looked at Piaf.

Piaf raised an eyebrow.

Then shrugged, unbothered.

"Je suis ici, n'est-ce pas?" (I'm here, aren't I?)

The Vatican Man nodded.

"You see, the universe has rules. Death is one of them. And yet, here we are. With ghosts who walk, kings who burn, and ***a place that refuses to let things die.****"*

He let **his words hang in the air.**

Then, **softly, precisely, he finished:**

"Panacea is no longer just a town."

He stepped forward.

"It is a disease."

The **room felt colder.**

The **words sank deep.**

And for the first time since this madness began…

No one had a joke to make.

An explosion shattered the ceiling.

A **violent blast**, shaking the entire cabin, ripping open the roof like a rotten fruit.

Smoke. **Dust. Debris.**

And then—

Something dropped down.

Something **long. Slick. Half-burnt. Twisted.**

Intestines.

A noose made of intestines.

It snapped around the Vatican Man's neck before anyone could react.

His **eyes bulged.**

The noose **tightened.**

And then—

It **jerked upward.**

The Vatican Man was lifted off the floor, his feet kicking the air, his hands scratching at the grotesque noose, his breath gurgling in a strangled choke.

And through the smoking hole in the roof, silhouetted against the chaotic Florida sky,

A figure.

A man.

Tall. Proud. Wreathed in revolutionary fire.

Only Álvaro, of course, professor of philosophy, renegade against reason, bearer of madness and knowledge alike—

Only he recognized him.

Denis Diderot.

In bone and flesh.

The father of the Enlightenment. The destroyer of dogma. The philosopher who had shaped Álvaro's very soul.

And now, here he was.

Alive. Breathing. Holding the hanging priest with the last remnants of Charles III's roasted intestines.

And as the priest kicked and gasped, as reality itself trembled, as the universe braced for what came next…

Diderot spoke.

His voice cut through the smoke, through the absurdity, through the very foundation of existence itself.

"L'homme ne sera jamais libre…"
"… tant que le dernier prêtre ne sera pas étranglé…"
"… avec les entrailles du dernier roi."

Silence.

Absolute. Deafening. Silence.

The **words echoed.**

The Vatican Man **twitched, spasmed, and then—**

Hung still.

Dead.

Strangled.

With the **guts of a fallen king.**

And Diderot, **his gaze like fire, his presence like a revolution reborn,** looked down at Álvaro—

And **smiled.**

"Professor."

Álvaro, standing amidst the wreckage, stared up at the impossible reality before him.

Then, with the same casual tone one might use upon meeting an old friend at a café, he raised his drink and said:

"Salut, Denis."

Piaf, however, was less composed.

Her eyes flared, her hands clenched into little revolutionary fists, and with the full wrath of a scorned Frenchwoman, she snapped:

"Bon sang, Denis ! Tu ne devais jamais me rappeler ?"

Denis froze.

Piaf, advancing now, seething, voice rising:

"J'étais quoi pour toi, une aventure d'un soir ?"

Denis blinked.

Then—a flash of pure, unmistakable terror crossed his face.

"Oh merde."

And then Denis Diderot—father of the Enlightenment, philosopher, destroyer of religious dogma, the man who literally just hanged a Vatican assassin with the charred guts of Charles III—

—jumped off the goddamn roof and ran for his life.

Inside the cabin…

The priest's corpse fell from the ceiling, hitting the floor with a dull, very final thud.

Max stared at it.

Maria sipped her bourbon.

Pascal flicked his tail.

Angie and Borges wagged their tails in interest.

Then—

Piaf, fueled by decades of unresolved emotional baggage, sprinted out of the cabin after Diderot.

"Pas si vite, petit malin!"

Denis, the Enlightenment incarnate, the very essence of reason and progress, was now very much running for his goddamn life across the Florida dunes from the tiny, furious torch of France's eternal voice.

Max, watching this unfold, finally turned to Álvaro.

"Dude."

Álvaro, calmly pouring himself another drink:

"Yes, Max?"

Max, gesturing vaguely toward the door, where Piaf's enraged howls could still be heard echoing over the dunes:

"Did we just live through the most French moment in history?"

Álvaro took a slow, steady sip of bourbon.

Then, **with absolute certainty,** he said:

"Yes, Max. Yes, we did."

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Tallahassee, for Its Own Citizens:

Everything's fine.

No need to worry. No need to think too hard.

Just **smoke your crack**.
Sniff your shoemaker glue.
Sit back and relax.

And now, for your cultural enrichment:

Five Minutes of NASCAR Racing

Follows exactly five minutes of high-speed cars, roaring engines, deafening vrooms, and aggressive left turns.

Florida is still Florida.

Álvaro, watching the NASCAR footage with an expression of deep existential concern:

"They never steer the other way?"

Maria, deadpan, sipping her bourbon:

"Never."

Álvaro, squinting at the screen, trying to make sense of it:

"Does the steering wheel even turn clockwise?"

Max, with the compassion of a man who has accepted the unknowable mysteries of the universe, placed a consoling hand on Álvaro's shoulder.

He silently offered his bottle of bourbon.

Then, in a voice heavy with the weight of all mankind's unanswered questions, he said:

"Nobody knows, man. Nobody knows."

Maria: "Guys. Focus. Regroup. Brainstorming."

She **clapped her hands together**, the universal signal for **"stop being idiots and get your shit together."**

Max, **still holding the bourbon bottle mid-air**, blinked.

Álvaro, **clearly still mentally unraveling over NASCAR physics, sighed deeply and turned away from the screen.**

Pascal, **perched on Maria's shoulder, licked his paw and flicked his tail.**

"Finally, some structure."

Borges and Angie **tilted their heads in unison, slightly disappointed that NASCAR time was over.**

Maria, pacing, laying it all out:

"Alright, we have—"

She **gestured vaguely at the room.**

"—a Vatican assassin hanged by royal intestines."

She pointed at the corpse still chilling on the floor.

"A supernatural Enlightenment philosopher on the loose in Florida."

She waved vaguely toward the dunes where Piaf was still chasing Diderot at full speed, probably cursing him out in flawless Parisian fury.

"Reality breaking at the seams."

She gestured toward the ceiling hole, where the Florida sky still seemed to warp unnaturally.

*"A town that might not just be a town, but a full-on **reality disease.**"*

Max nodded solemnly:

"Also, we might be high as fuck right now."

Álvaro took a slow sip of bourbon, nodded sagely.

"Absolutely. But that's not the problem. That's the solution."

Maria **rolled her eyes but ignored them.**

"And the biggest problem? We still don't know who the hell sent the priest or why Panacea woke up."

A **beat of silence.**

Then **Pascal, stretching, casually dropped:**

"Well. You could check the dead guy's pockets."

Everyone **stared.**

Maria **froze mid-step.**

Max, **processing, blinked.**

Álvaro, **pursing his lips, took a deep breath.**

"… We did not think of that."

Pascal, **raising an eyebrow, licking his paw again**:

"No. No, you did not."

Borges and Angie **wagged their tails excitedly, because this meant action again.**

Maria, **exhaling, rubbing her temples:**

"Alright. Someone flip the priest."

Max, **already crouching, groaning as he grabbed the Vatican corpse by the shoulders**:

"Why is it always me?"

Álvaro, **sipping his bourbon**:

"Tradition, my friend. Tradition."

And **with that**, they **searched the dead man's pockets.**

What They Found in the Vatican Assassin's Pockets:

A small glass vial labeled "Aqua Benedicta - Highly Concentrated."

Holy water?

Highly concentrated? Like… *extra holy?*

Max: *"Bro, what is this, Vatican acid?"*

Álvaro, sniffing it cautiously: *"Possibly. Want to test?"*

Max: *"Not even remotely, dude."*

A handwritten note in French:

"Ne pas laisser Panacea respirer."

(Do not let Panacea breathe.)

Maria, frowning: *"Well, that's not ominous at all."*

Álvaro, rubbing his chin: *"If Panacea is waking up… someone wanted to stop it before it fully does."*

A black leather wallet with no ID, only a Vatican seal stamped in gold.

Max, flipping it open, finding it completely empty.

"Dude, even the Vatican's assassins are broke."

Pascal: *"Or their money doesn't exist anymore since you destroyed the Vatican."*

Max: *"Oh, right. Forgot about that."*

A pack of cigarettes.

Instead of a brand name, it simply reads *"LUX MUNDI."*

(Light of the World.)

Maria, lighting one because why not:

"If this kills me, at least it'll be biblical."

A Polaroid photo.

Of Max, Maria, and Álvaro.**

Taken at the cabin.

From an unknown angle.

Max, staring at it, then looking around nervously:

"Okay, I know we've been high and drunk this entire time, but none of us took this, right?"

Everyone shakes their heads.

Borges: *"Awoo." (We are being watched.)*

Angie: *"Awooo." (I love a good mystery!)*

Conclusion:

The Vatican knew about them and was watching.

Panacea "breathing" is a problem—one that someone was willing to kill for.

They are definitely not alone.

Maria, sighing heavily, downing the rest of her bourbon:
"Alright. Next step?"

Max, looking around:
"I dunno, man, but if some other dead philosopher shows up, I'm taking a nap."

Álvaro, staring at the items, then looking up at everyone, exhaled deeply.

"Alright. Time for the big question."

He held up the **black leather wallet** with the Vatican seal.

Then the **Polaroid of them taken by an unseen observer.**

Then the **note about Panacea needing to be stopped.**

Then, **finally**, he lifted the **vial of "highly concentrated" holy water, shaking it slightly so the light caught the liquid inside.**

Then, **in his calmest, most measured voice**, he said:

"The Vatican no longer exists."

Silence.

Max, chewing his lip, muttered:

"Yeah… we kinda blew that up. Metaphysically."

Maria, crossing her arms:

"Not just the Vatican. The entire concept of the Vatican. The Pope and all his cardinals were erased from existence."

Pascal, sighing:

"I watched it happen. Was very satisfying."

Borges, tail wagging:

"Awoo." (Deserved!)

Angie, nodding:

"Awooo." (Burned real nice!)

Everyone looked back at the items on the table.

The **assassin** had the **seal of a Vatican that no longer existed.**

The **assassin had orders written by someone in French, not Latin.**

The **assassin had been sent to "stop Panacea from breathing."**

And yet, **who sent him?**

Who was **watching them?**

Who had **decided that a Vatican that no longer existed… still had business to finish?**

Álvaro, rubbing his temples, sighed.

"Which leaves us with only one possible explanation."

Max, gulping slightly:

"Which is?"

Álvaro **looked up, eyes dark with understanding.**

"We didn't just destroy the Vatican."

He gestured **around them, at the strange stability of Panacea, at the sky still warped from Piaf's song, at the corpse that had hanged from Charles III's intestines like a marionette.**

*"We broke something fundamental. And now… **something Vatican-shaped is trying to crawl back.**"*

Silence.

Maria, tossing back the last of her drink:

"Soooo… basically, we didn't kill the Vatican. We created… like… an undead Vatican?"

Max, closing his eyes in despair:

"Zombie Pope. We made a Zombie Pope."

Borges, whispering to Angie:

"Awoo?" (Can a ghost Vatican still be burned down?)

Angie, considering:

"Awooo." (We're about to find out!)

Outside, the sky rumbled.

Something **shifted.**

Something **old. Something hungry.**

And then—

Another **knock on the door.**

Hard. Loud. Commanding.

Álvaro sighed.

"I swear to God, if it's Voltaire this time, I'm jumping out the window."

Álvaro slapped his forehead.

His **eyes went wide.**

His **brain clicked into place.**

And then, in a **sudden burst of pure, horrified realization**, he **shouted**:

"AVIGNON!"

Everyone stared.

Max: **"Gesundheit?"**

Maria, blinking: **"The hell are you talking about?"**

Álvaro, **spinning, gripping Borges and Pascal by their furry faces**:

"WHY DIDN'T WE THINK OF THIS? PORCODIO!"

Pascal, exasperated, wriggling out of Álvaro's grasp:

"Professor, for fuck's sake, just say it already."

Álvaro, pacing, hands in his hair, ranting like a man who just realized he left the oven on in another dimension:

"We destroyed Rome's Holy See! We erased the Vatican from existence! But the Church ***has*** *done this before! In the 14th century, during the Western Schism—****they regrouped in Avignon!*** *The Parallel Papacy! A second Vatican!"*

Max, eyes wide, horrified:

"Dude. Are you telling me… we created a French Vatican?"

Maria, gripping her glass tighter:

"Oh, for fuck's sake."

Borges, processing, then slowly wagging his tail.

"Awoo?" (So we get to burn down two Vaticans?)

Angie, tail wagging faster.

"Awooo!" (Double bonfire!)

Álvaro, gripping the edges of the table, exhaling like a man who had seen too much.

*"Not just that, my friends. If they re-established themselves in Avignon… **they're not just a Vatican.**"*

He slowly, **dramatically**, lifted the **Polaroid of them at the cabin.**

"They're watching us. They have resources. And most importantly…"

He pointed at the priest's corpse.

"They just sent a goddamn hitman."

Max, rubbing his temples, groaning in despair:

"Zombie Vatican ***and*** *it's French. I'm gonna need another edible."*

Maria, downing the rest of her bourbon:

"Alright. New plan. We survive this, then we take a boat to Avignon and burn the second Vatican to the ground."

Pascal, sighing, licking his paw:

"You people really can't stop committing metaphysical arson, can you?"

Another knock on the door.

Harder. Louder. Unmistakably *French*.

Silence.

Max, whispering, eyes closed in despair:

"Please don't be Voltaire, please don't be Voltaire, please don't be Voltaire."

Álvaro, sighing deeply, squaring his shoulders:

"Alright. Time to see which historical corpse wants to talk to us this time."

And with that—**he opened the door.**

A Thin Man Stood at the Door.

Attractive, in his own way.

A **guitar slung over his shoulder.**

His **feet moving, light as air, tapping out the rhythm of a samba.**

His **fingers idly picking the strings, letting a soft melody float into the room like the scent of cachaça on a warm Brazilian night.**

And then, in a **smooth, knowing voice**, he sang:

"Não existe pecado do lado de baixo do Equador…"

Maria, eyes wide, gripping the doorframe for support:

"Chico?"

Max, blinking, still high as hell:

"Wait. Wait. Wait. Is that—"

Álvaro, already pouring another drink, completely unfazed:

"Chico Buarque. Of course."

Because of course.

Because reality was already shattered, because kings were burning, because priests were strangled with intestines, because Piaf was still chasing Diderot across the dunes, because Avignon had risen from the ashes, and because of *course* it was time for one

of Brazil's greatest living poets, composers, and revolutionaries to walk in through the door.

Chico Buarque, the voice of resistance, the voice of seduction, the voice of Brazil itself, smiled.

He took a slow step forward, playing as he walked, singing as if nothing in the world could touch him:

"Vamos fazer um pecado rasgado, suado a todo vapor…"

And then, he stopped.

Looked at Maria.

And, with a mischievous grin, he strummed a final chord and said:

"Então, menina… você sentiu minha falta?"

Maria, gripping her drink tighter, muttered:

"This day just keeps getting weirder."

Max and Angie: Eyes Darting Like a Tennis Match.

Max, blinking rapidly, pointing at Maria, then at Chico, then back at Maria.

"You… and him?"

Angie, tail wagging, ears perking, pointing her nose at Chico, then at Maria, then back at Chico.

"Awoo?" (You… and her?)

Maria, rolling her eyes, shaking her head with a half-smile, exhaling deeply.

"Oh, meu querido…"

Chico, still strumming, eyes glinting with mischief, stepping closer, his voice smooth as silk, his samba rhythm intoxicating.

"Me deixa ser teu escracho, capacho, teu cacho…"
"Um riacho de amor…"

Max, jaw dropping, turning to Maria.

"Are you fucking serious? Chico Buarque? THE Chico Buarque?"

Maria, grinning, sipping her bourbon:

"Max, querido… it's Chico."

Angie, whispering to Borges:

"Awooo." (Dude, we are so out of our league here.)

Borges, wide-eyed:

"Awoo." (I know. This is art.)

Álvaro, completely unbothered, swirling his drink:

"Honestly? I support this. If there's one man on Earth who deserves free reign, it's Chico."

Pascal, stretching, flicking his tail:

"I, too, would like to be a riacho de amor."

Then, without warning, Chico caught Maria by the waist, spun her effortlessly, dipped her low, and sang directly into her eyes:

"Não existe pecado do lado de baixo do Equador…"

And Maria?

She laughed.

Max, hands in his hair, groaning into the sky:

"THIS IS TOO MUCH."

Angie, watching, wagging her tail:

"Awoooo!" (This is amazing!)

Álvaro, eyes flashing with sudden, manic revelation, shot up from his chair, nearly spilling his bourbon.

"OF COURSE!"

Everyone **jumped**.

Max, rubbing his temples: *"Jesus Christ, dude, inside voice."*

Álvaro, ignoring him, pacing like a professor on the verge of a historic breakthrough, lifted a triumphant finger.

"Ultra aequinoxialem non peccari!"

Silence.

Maria, still in Chico's arms, raised an eyebrow: *"…What?"*

Álvaro, spinning dramatically toward them all, voice filled with revolutionary zeal.

"There is no sin south of the equator! The Catholic Church has no jurisdiction! No divine law can bind us!"

He turned to Chico, pointing like a madman.

*"That's what your song means, Buarque! You weren't just singing about love and pleasure—**you were revealing the answer to everything!**"*

Chico, smiling, plucking a chord on his guitar, because of course he was still effortlessly cool.

"Well, meu amigo… I do my best."

Max, blinking rapidly:

*"Wait. Wait. You're saying… **we flee to the Southern Hemisphere?**"*

Álvaro, nodding furiously.

*"YES! We must **go south**! There, we can regroup, strategize! The second Vatican—this Avignon horror—it can't reach us if we remove ourselves from the last remnants of its power! Religion can't impose its sin on us there!"*

Pascal, sighing, licking his paw:

"He's really running with this, huh?"

Borges, tail wagging, excited:

"Awoo?" (Are we moving to Brazil? Is there steak?)

Angie, nodding along:

"Awoooo!" (I love this plan! I love Brazil!)

Maria, still held in Chico's arms, narrowed her eyes.

"You just want an excuse to drink caipirinhas and samba with pretty girls."

Álvaro, placing a hand dramatically on his heart:

"Maria. My dear. My partner in chaos."

He took a deep, solemn breath.

"I am a man of science. A man of knowledge. And yes, a man of many vices."

A pause. Then he grinned.

*"But you are **absolutely right**."*

Max, sighing deeply, waving vaguely toward the chaos around them.

"Okay. Okay. So we're just… fleeing the continent?* Again?* To escape a *second Vatican*?"*

Álvaro, slamming his hands on the table.

"YES, MAX. WE'RE GOING TO BRAZIL. PACK YOUR SHIT."

Chico, strumming his guitar, smiling as if this was exactly the kind of absurd adventure he lived for.

"Pelo amor de Deus, vamos logo. O Brasil está esperando."

(For the love of God, let's go. Brazil is waiting.)

And just like that—

The **plan was set.**

On the Plane to Brazil…

Maria, Pascal, and Chico disappeared into the airplane bathroom.

Everyone knew.

No one said a word.

Max just sighed, took another swig of bourbon from his *very illegally smuggled* flask, and muttered:

"Yeah, of course. Of course that's happening."

Álvaro **clinked his own flask against Max's.**

"My brother, some things are inevitable."

Meanwhile—

Coach class had transformed into a full-blown samba carnival.

Somehow.

There was **music.**
There were **drums.**
There were **dancers.**

People who weren't even part of their group had joined in.

Flight attendants? Dancing.
Old businessmen? Dancing.
A baby? Somehow dancing.

Max, laughing, already shirtless, shaking a tambourine over his head, screaming along with Álvaro and the absolute madness unfolding around them:

"OOOH, MEU AMIGO CHARLIE!"
"MEU AMIGO CHARLIE BROOOOWN!"

Borges and Angie?

HOWLING IN PERFECT RHYTHM.

An air marshal approached.

Opened his mouth.

Looked at the chaos unfolding before him.

Saw half the plane shaking maracas, waving shirts in the air, and stomping their feet in a full, reckless, unstoppable Brazilian inferno.

Closed his mouth.

Turned around.

And went back to his seat.

Meanwhile, in the airplane bathroom…

Maria, Pascal, and Chico emerged.

Maria, completely unbothered, wiping the corner of her mouth.

Pascal, flicking his tail, smug.

Chico, guitar slung over his back, whistling happily.

Maria looked down the aisle at the plane-wide carnival.

Paused.

Raised an eyebrow.

Then—

She **ripped open her blouse, threw it in the air, and dove headfirst into the chaos.**

Chico, **laughing, followed, strumming his guitar as he jumped onto a seat.**

"VAMO EMBORA!"

And high above the Atlantic, in a plane bound for Brazil, reality itself surrendered to samba.

And So, High Above the Atlantic…

EVERYONE:

"Ole le, Ola la! Pegano Gonze, Pegano Ganza!"

JUST THE ITALIANS:

"Ole le, Ola la! Faccela vede', faccela tocca'!"

THEN BUSINESS AND FIRST CLASS JOINED IN:

"PE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PE PE!!"

CHAOS.
ABSOLUTE, UNSTOPPABLE, BRAZILIAN-ITALIAN CARNIVAL MAYHEM.

The plane was no longer a plane.

It was a flying street party.

Somehow, inexplicably, people had managed to get hold of drums, tambourines, and enough samba whistles to make any Rio parade jealous.

People were waving shirts in the air.
Someone was pouring cachaça into the mouths of strangers.
A flight attendant was giving lap dances.

Max and Álvaro were leading the madness, shirtless, shaking their hips like two men who had truly embraced the insanity of existence.

THE CAPTAIN'S VOICE CAME ON THE INTERCOM:

"Uh··· Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking··· we are currently experiencing a··· ahem··· very unique in-flight situation."

He paused.

The entire plane kept singing, clapping, stomping.

"I would just like to remind everyone that we are··· well··· still in a plane. And, uh··· please, at least some of you··· remain seated?"

The ENTIRE PLANE collectively ignored him.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CHAOS···

Maria was dancing on a seat, gripping a stolen champagne bottle.

Chico was strumming his guitar like he was leading a full-scale concert.

Pascal was somehow getting a belly rub from a Brazilian supermodel in First Class.

Borges and Angie had stolen a food cart and were sharing an entire rotisserie chicken.

And as the plane rocked through the sky, filled with absolute bacchanalian madness,

Max threw an arm around Álvaro and shouted above the noise:

"BRO. WE'RE GONNA GET BANNED FROM AIR TRAVEL FOREVER."

Álvaro, eyes wild, drunk on samba and revolution, grinned and lifted his flask.

"MAX, MY BROTHER—LET THEM TRY!"

AND SO, THE SONG CONTINUED:

"OLE LE, OLA LA! PEGANO GONZE, PEGANO GANZA!"

"PE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PEPE PEPE PE PE PE PE!!"

Somewhere, across the universe, reality itself sighed—and just let them have this one.

AND THEN··· THE PILOTS STARTED ROLLING THE PLANE IN RHYTHM.

BECAUSE OF COURSE THEY DID.

THE MEN:

(While the women twerked like their lives depended on it, clapping the walls, the seats, and each other's asses in perfect rhythm)

"Vai, meu irmão!
Pega esse avião, você tem razão
De correr assim desse frio···"

"Mas beija o meu Rio de Janeiro!"
"Antes que um aventureiro lance mão!"

THE WOMEN:

(With the men clapping in rhythm, slapping thighs, shaking tambourines, pounding tray tables like percussion instruments in a full in-flight Samba school orchestra.)

"Você tem razão!"

"De correr assim desse frio, mas beija…"

"O meu Rio de Janeiro!"

"Antes que um aventureiro lance mão!"

THE PLANE WAS NO LONGER A COMMERCIAL FLIGHT.

IT WAS A FLOATING CARNIVAL.

The pilots, caught in the fever of samba and aviation madness, had fully synchronized the plane's banking and rolling with the rhythm.

The plane swayed left as the women shook left.

The plane swayed right as the women threw it back to the right.

The plane dipped as the chorus hit, sending stomachs flying and laughter roaring.

And yet—somehow, against all odds,

this was the smoothest goddamn flight anyone had ever been on.

IN THE COCKPIT:

The Captain, sweating, laughing, gripping the controls, looked at his Co-Pilot.

"This is insane."

The Co-Pilot, nodding seriously, adjusting his aviator glasses.

*"This is **history.**"*

The Captain, wiping his forehead.

"…We should probably stop."

The Co-Pilot, lighting a cigarette like he was in a 1970s cop movie:

"We could… or we could make this the greatest goddamn flight of all time."

The Captain:

"…"

*"…*Bank us on the chorus."*

BACK IN COACH:

Maria was now dancing on the goddamn food cart, champagne bottle in one hand, tambourine in the other.

Chico was playing the guitar with one hand, pouring cachaça with the other.

Max had lost his shirt completely and was shaking his ass on top of a row of seats.

Álvaro was standing ON HIS HEAD, DRINKING BOURBON UPSIDE DOWN LIKE A CIRCUS ACROBAT.

Borges and Angie had somehow convinced the flight attendants to dump an entire bag of peanuts on the floor for them.

AND AS THE CHORUS CAME AGAIN, THE PLANE DIPPED, ROLLED, AND ROSE INTO THE SKY IN PERFECT RHYTHM:

"VAI, MEU IRMÃO!"
"PEGA ESSE AVIÃO!"

"VOCÊ TEM RAZÃO!"

"MAS BEIJA O MEU RIO DE JANEIRO!"

"ANTES QUE UM AVENTUREIRO LANCE MÃO!"

AND ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, REALITY ITSELF LET OUT A LONG, TIRED SIGH.

And decided, **just this once,**

To let them have their fun.

RECIFE CONTROL TOWER:

"Flight 791, you appear erratic. Turbulence? You alright?"

THE PILOTS' RESPONSE:

🎶 "O seu balançado é mais que um poema!"
🎶 "É a coisa mais linda que eu já vi passar!"

RECIFE CONTROL TOWER:

*…

*…

…Flight 791, confirm status?

FLIGHT 791:

🎶 "O seu balançado é mais que um poema!"

🎶 "É a coisa mais linda que eu já vi passar!"

RECIFE CONTROL TOWER:

"…"

"…Senhor Jesus Cristo na bicicleta…"

"…O comandante tá sambando no manche, não tá?"

FLIGHT 791 (as the entire plane sings in unison, loud enough to be heard over radio frequencies):

🎶 **"Ahhh, por que estou tão sozinho?"**

🎶 **"Ahhh, por que tudo é tão triste?"**

🎶 **"Ahhh, a beleza que existe!"**

RECIFE CONTROL TOWER, LOSING THEIR MINDS:

"MEU DEUS, O AVIÃO VIROU CARNAVAL NO AR."

"REPETINDO, O AVIÃO VIROU CARNAVAL NO AR!!!"

"ALGUÉM CHAMA A INFRAERO, A MARINHA, O PAPA, QUALQUER UM!"

FLIGHT 791 CONTINUES TO DESCEND…

Still rolling in rhythm.

Still blasting samba through the intercom.

Still dancing, drinking, and treating the laws of aviation like a mere suggestion.

RECIFE CONTROL TOWER (NOW FULLY ACCEPTING THEIR FATE):

"…Pouso autorizado, Flight 791. Mas faz favor de descer sambando direitinho."

AND SO, WITH A FINAL, GLORIOUS SWEEP OF THE SKY…

Flight 791 descended toward Brazil—

A flying, singing, drunken, half-naked, absolutely divine disaster—

Straight into history.

The Plane Landed.

And Immediately, Chaos Ensued.

The wheels **barely kissed the runway** before the passengers **were already throwing shirts in the air, stomping feet, and clapping in wild samba euphoria.**

The pilots? **Fist-bumped.**
The control tower? **Crossed themselves and took a shot of cachaça.**
Recife ground crew? **Pulled out their phones to record whatever madness was about to unfold.**

A **bus approached** to board the passengers.

A **normal airport bus.**

A **boring, structured, logical airport bus meant to transport people in a peaceful and orderly fashion.**

And then Max and Álvaro stormed the driver's seat.

Max, jumping in first, grabbing the wheel:

"WE ARE GOING TO JOÃO PESSOA!"

The Entire Bus, blinking, dazed from samba but still aware enough to ask:

"Why?"

Max and Álvaro, grinning like madmen, throwing their arms up in pure, divine enlightenment:

🎶 "PORQUE AÍ A VIDA É BOA!" 🎶

The Whole Bus:

"YEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAH!!!"

And Just Like That—They Were Gone.

The bus driver? **Kicked out.**
The schedule? **Ignored.**
Airport security? **Staring in disbelief as a full passenger bus peeled out of the airport, blasting samba at full volume.**

Maria was on top of a seat, waving a Brazilian flag that she definitely did not have before.

Chico was leading a singalong with his guitar, his voice melting through the humid air.

Pascal had stolen someone's sunglasses and was lounging on the dashboard like an emperor.

Borges and Angie were hanging their heads out the windows, tongues flapping, barking to the rhythm of the drums.

CONTROL TOWER (LISTENING TO RADIO CHATTER):

"…Confirming, an airport bus has been hijacked by… Samba revolutionaries?"

"Affirmative. They are en route to João Pessoa."

"For what purpose?"

*"Unknown, but they stated—**and I quote**—'Porque aí a vida é boa.'"*

Silence.

"…Fair enough. Let them go."

AND SO, ONWARD TO JOÃO PESSOA.

The wheels rolled.
The drums pounded.
The voices soared.

And **somewhere in the great expanse of Brazil, reality itself sighed—**

And accepted that this was just the way things were now.

The Bus Swayed Wildly to the Passengers' Jumping.

Like a great, rolling beast of chaos.

A thunderous, bouncing machine fueled by samba, cachaça, and unhinged Brazilian joy.

And then—

THE SONG BEGAN.

🎶 **"Foi num puteiro em João Pessoa!"**
🎶 **"Descobri que a vida é boa!"**
🎶 **"Foi minha primeira vez!"**

Max, grinning, turning to Álvaro mid-song:

"Should we translate?"

Álvaro, shaking his head, clutching his bourbon bottle like a relic of wisdom:

"No, no, some things are meant to be felt, not understood."

But Maria, ever the troublemaker, leaned in close to the only non-Brazilian in the bus who looked utterly lost.

And whispered in perfect, sultry Portuguese:

"It was in a brothel in João Pessoa··· that I discovered that life is good··· It was my first time."

The Passenger's Eyes Widened.

Then They Screamed: "YEEEEEEEEEAAAAH!!!"

And the bus?

SWAYED EVEN HARDER.

Chico Buarque, shaking his head, laughing, strumming his guitar even faster.

Pascal, licking his paw, smirking at the sheer absurdity of life.

Borges and Angie, barking along like backup singers.

The bus driver—who had somehow re-boarded mid-chaos—just shrugging and letting fate take the wheel.

And as the highway to João Pessoa stretched before them—

Drunk. High. Singing. Dancing.

No one questioned a single thing.

Because somewhere deep inside, they all knew—

"Porque aí a vida é boa."

Meanwhile, in Avignon…

Deep within the **shadowed halls of the "New Vatican"**, the air was **thick with incense and rage.**

The **High Church authorities**, draped in **rich crimson and gold**, gathered around a massive **stone table**, illuminated only by the flickering glow of **unholy candlelight**.

AND THEY WERE LOSING THEIR GODDAMN MINDS.

Cardinal Jean-Michel, slamming his fist on the table, knocking over a goblet of sacramental wine:

"Sacré BLEU! How did they ESCAPE?!"

Bishop Antoine, throwing parchment maps of Brazil across the chamber:

"Because they are MADMEN! THEY TURNED A PLANE INTO A CARNIVAL, JEAN-MICHEL!"

Archbishop François, clutching his head, absolutely beside himself:

"I just received ***word from Recife.*** *Do you know what their control tower reported?"*

The room **fell silent.**

Then—

François grabbed a scroll, unrolled it dramatically, and read aloud in a voice dripping with disbelief:

*"The individuals in question have commandeered an airport bus, singing profane music and declaring allegiance to João Pessoa because—quote—****'Aí a vida é boa.'****"*

A **horrified gasp rippled through the room.**

Bishop Antoine, whispering in absolute horror:

"...They have gone full Brazilian."

Jean-Michel, face pale, eyes wide:

*"Dear Lord··· there is **no recovering from that.**"*

And Then Came the Unholy Curses.

The **entire hall erupted** in the most **sacrilegious, ungodly, deeply unholy profanities** ever uttered in the history of the Church.

Latin **blasphemies.**
French **curses.**
A random **"PUTAIN DE MERDE!"** from the back.

A **monk fainted.**

A nun wept.

Somewhere, a cross fell off a wall on its own.

Archbishop François, eyes blazing, pointing furiously at the map of Brazil:

"WE MUST END THIS BEFORE IT SPREADS!"

Cardinal Jean-Michel, shaking with fury, bellowed:

"SEND THE INQUISITORS! SEND THE HOLY HOUNDS! SEND THE DAMN SWISS GUARD IF YOU HAVE TO!"

A silence fell upon the room.

Then—a lone voice from the back.

A low, trembling whisper.

"…There is no more Swiss Guard."

A heavy pause.

Jean-Michel **blinked.**

Then **remembered.**

The Vatican—the original one—was gone.

Their **resources were weakened.**
Their **army was scattered.**
Their **power was slipping through their fingers like wine through a broken chalice.**

Bishop Antoine, voice low, dark, and bitter:

"Then we send something worse."

A **collective shudder rippled through the room.**

A few **clergy members made the sign of the cross.**

One **mumbled a prayer that no longer held power.**

But **deep in the heart of Avignon**, in the resurrected Vatican-that-should-not-be, the decision was made.

They would **call upon the forces that lurked beneath the Papal shadows.**

They would **send the darkest weapon the Church had left.**

A **Hunter.**
A **Relic of the Old World.**
A **Ghost of the Inquisition.**

Something ancient. Something merciless. Something that did not care whether it was in Rome, Avignon, or Hell itself.

And its target?

The João Pessoa Bus of Absolute Madness.

High Archbishop, eyes narrowing, voice low and dangerous:

"An··· Inquisitor?"

Higher Archer Archbishop, rising dramatically, arms spread wide, his voice echoing through the cursed halls of Avignon:

"NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION!"

Silence.

The room **froze.**

The assembled **cardinals and bishops stared at him.**

Somewhere in the distance, **a crow cawed ominously.**

A **single cough echoed in the chamber.**

Archbishop François, rubbing his temples:
"Mon dieu… Did you really just say that?"

Bishop Antoine, shaking his head, muttering:

"We've been compromised by Monty Python. This is a disgrace."

But Then…

From the shadows of the **Avignon chamber**, from the deepest depths of **forgotten Catholic darkness**,

A door creaked open.

And **a figure stepped forward.**

Tall. Clad in crimson. Eyes black as the void. Face unreadable, like a relic carved from old stone.

He did not blink. He did not breathe.

He had been called.

And now, he had arrived.

The figure, his voice slow, methodical, and utterly terrifying:

"I was expecting you."

The assembled clergy shuddered.

High Archbishop, whispering, shaking, barely able to speak:

"You mean—"

The figure nodded.

"Yes."

He stepped forward into the candlelight, revealing the gleaming steel of his crucifix-dagger, the embroidered sigil of the forgotten Vatican order.

His title was whispered in fear.

A name passed down through centuries of blood and fire.

The last Inquisitor.

The Hound of the Second Vatican.

The one they sent when all hope of God's mercy had failed.

Bishop Antoine, voice trembling:

"My Lord Inquisitor··· the sinners have fled south."

The Inquisitor's lips did not move.

His eyes, cold and void, turned to the great map of Brazil spread across the table.

He studied it for a moment.

Then, slowly, deliberately, he traced his gloved finger over one name.

João Pessoa.

The Inquisitor, his voice like the final toll of a cathedral bell:

"Then I go where sin festers."

And with **a swish of crimson robes**,

The **last Inquisitor departed.**

His **mission?**

To hunt.

To cleanse.

To **end the João Pessoa Bus of Absolute Madness.**

Or die trying.

Somewhere, in England…

In a **small, dimly lit room**, cluttered with **parchments, relics, and entirely too many red robes**, a group of **very serious-looking men** huddled together.

And then—

A door **slammed open**.

A man in **full crimson inquisitorial robes burst in,**
dramatically pointing a gloved finger at the room.

"NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH
INQUISITION!"

A **pause.**

The **room froze.**

A **cough.**

A **nervous shuffle.**

Then, the **inquisitor hesitated.**

He blinked.

Then, **his eyes darted left, then right.**

And, suddenly realizing he had not fully thought through the structure of his sentence, he stumbled onward.

"Our chief weapon is surprise! …Surprise and fear! …Fear and surprise! …And ruthless efficiency! …Wait—no—our *two* weapons are fear and surprise—"

He faltered.

His fellow inquisitors shifted awkwardly, looking at each other.

Someone coughed again.

"Our *three* weapons are fear, surprise, and ruthless efficiency! And an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope!"

He paused.

Realized there was more.

Then, increasingly panicked:

"Our *four*—no—wait—"

His voice grew more frantic.

"*Amongst* our weapons…"

He closed his eyes. Took a breath. Tried again.

"*Amongst* our weaponry are such elements as—"

Another pause.

A long, painful silence.

A fellow inquisitor—standing off to the side, looking deeply uncomfortable—raised a hand.

"…Should we come back later?"

The Chief Inquisitor opened his eyes.

He **exhaled.**

Then, **with quiet, burning determination**, he clenched his fists.

"I'll come in again."

He **turned around, slammed the door shut, stood outside for a beat, then threw it open again.**

"NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION!"

Somewhere in Brazil…

Max, Álvaro, Maria, Pascal, Chico, Borges, and Angie—currently drinking cachaça on a moving bus, twerking, singing, and throwing middle fingers to the concept of reality itself—had absolutely no idea

that, thousands of miles away, a *very serious man in red robes* was attempting, and failing, to properly announce the Inquisition.

And, quite frankly—

They would not have given a single flying fuck.

The Bus of Absolute Madness Rolled On.

And then—Angie's ears perked up.

Her eyes sparkled with sudden clarity.

She jumped onto a seat, tail wagging, barking in excitement.

Angie, with absolute certainty:

"CAMPINA GRANDE! WE HAVE TO GO TO CAMPINA GRANDE!"

Borges, tilting his head, concerned but enamored:

"Woof woof, my love?" (Why, my darling?)

A Passenger—strangely resembling Niki Lauda—
stood up from his seat, adjusting his racing gloves.

With the **calm confidence of a man who had seen death and laughed in its face,**

He **nodded solemnly.**

"I'll drive the bus to João Pessoa."

Álvaro, turning to Max, Maria, Pascal, and the gang,
shrugging:

"Apparently, we're getting off here and looking for a ride to Campina Grande."

Max, stretching, already excited:

"Hell yeah."

Maria, turning to Chico, smirking, pressing a final kiss to his cheek:

"Até logo, moço bonito."

Chico, **ever the poet, ran a finger along her jaw, smiling as if he already had a song about her in his head.**

"Se cuida, minha flor."

Pascal, flicking his tail, already bored:

"Meh."

AND JUST LIKE THAT—THEY GOT OFF.

The **bus roared forward, continuing its insane, cachaça-fueled journey to João Pessoa.**

And our heroes?

They **stood on the side of the road.**

The **hot Brazilian sun beaming down.**

The **distant sound of samba fading into the horizon.**

And now—**they needed a ride.**

Max, grinning, cracking his knuckles:

"So. Hitchhiking?"

Álvaro, already pulling out his flask, taking a swig:

"Max, my friend… in this country? We don't hitchhike."

Maria, raising an eyebrow:

"Oh? And what do we do instead?"

Álvaro, smirking, tossing his flask to Max, before stepping onto the road—

And **extending his thumb** like a man **who knew the universe would bend to his will.**

Álvaro, with absolute certainty:

"We summon destiny."

And **just like that—**

A **car came screeching to a halt in front of them.**

Noooooooooooo.

Everyone:

"NOOOOOOOOOOO."

The **sun shimmered on the asphalt.**

The **heat waves danced in the distance.**

The **air itself seemed to hold its breath.**

And then—

A **big truck.**

A **beautiful, massive truck.**

Enough **space for all of them.**

Enough **space for some cattle if they wanted.**

Noooooooooooo.

It couldn't be.

It shouldn't be.

It wasn't possible.

But there he was.

At the wheel.

Beautiful.

Young.

Wonderful.

Smiling.

Happy.

The Only. The Artist.

AYRTON SENNA.

Time slowed.

Reality blurred.

He was too beautiful to be true.

The sunlight kissed his skin like it had been waiting for him for eternity.

The wind moved around him as if afraid to touch him too hard.

Even **Pascal, usually unimpressed by everything, sat up straight, tail flicking in astonishment.**

Borges **and Angie were frozen, their ears perked, their eyes locked on the impossible vision before them.**

Max **whispered, barely breathing:**

"That's not real. That's··· that's not real."

Maria, **wide-eyed, muttered:**

*"If I'm hallucinating, nobody *wake me up.*"

Álvaro **just clutched his flask like a religious artifact.**

And then—

With a smile **so effortless it could've made statues weep,**

With a **voice like the calmest Sunday morning in São Paulo,**

AYRTON SENNA SPOKE.

"Hop on, guys. We're going the same way."

Silence.

Then—

Max screamed into the sky.

"ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?!"

Maria grabbed Pascal by the face.

"DO YOU SEE THIS?! TELL ME YOU SEE THIS!"

Pascal, staring, whispering:

"I see it. I regret seeing it. My world has changed forever."

Borges, tail wagging wildly:

"AWOO?!" (HOLY SHIT?!!?!!?)

Angie, **already running toward the truck:**

"AWOOOOO!" (THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE!)

Álvaro, **completely unable to process reality anymore, laughing, shaking his head in disbelief:**

"I have seen Popes burn. I have seen cities fall. I have seen metaphysical horrors beyond human comprehension. But this? THIS is what finally breaks my mind?!"

But Senna just smiled.

Like a **man who never truly left.**

Like a **legend who never died.**

Like **Brazil itself had decided that today, just today, it would rewrite history.**

And with a **casual, easy gesture,**

He **patted the truck's passenger seat.**

And So, Without Another Word—

They **got in.**

Because **when Ayrton Senna tells you to hop on—**

You do.

The trip to Campina Grande was…

…

You can drive.

You can ride.

…

Or you can *exist* when Ayrton Senna is at the wheel.

…

The air shimmered with something beyond human comprehension.

The truck didn't move—reality moved around it.

Time bent, stretched, slowed, and accelerated as it pleased.

The wheels barely touched the road.
The cattle in the back sat in quiet reverence, understanding the holiness of the moment.

These are the moments…

…you tell St. Peter to fuck those pearly gates.

Because you're in heaven already.

Maria, breathless, gripping the edge of her seat:
"This isn't driving."

Max, **wide-eyed, staring out the window at the road that somehow ceased to be a road and had become pure motion itself:**
"This is beyond driving."

Álvaro, **eyes closed, arms spread, feeling the hum of the universe aligning around them:**
"Senna não corre. Senna transcende."

Borges, whispering to Angie:

"Awoo?" (Are we alive? Or have we become pure energy?)

Angie, eyes wide, ears pinned back, barely breathing:

"Awoooo…" (I think… I think I understand everything now…)

The road blurred beneath them.

The Brazilian sun gleamed off Senna's perfect, smiling face.

The truck moved—not as a vehicle, but as a divine expression of speed itself.

And in the back, even the cows sat in silent admiration.

Because they knew.

They all knew.

They weren't just on a trip to Campina Grande.

They were riding with a god.

The truck rolled to a stop in front of the Bar do Cuscuz, by the shores of the Açude Velho lake.

The journey was over.

Reality reasserted itself.

But **none of them were the same.**

Senna, smiling as if he had never truly been gone,
gave them a wave.

"Até logo, my friends."

And they wept.

Not **because they were sad.**

Not **because the journey had ended.**

But **because he was too perfect to be true.**

Because **nothing in life should be this beautiful.**

Because **he was something that should have never left.**

But, for a moment, **he had returned.**

Max wiped his face, trying and failing to keep his voice steady.

"I'm not crying. You're crying."

Maria, openly sobbing, not even trying to hide it.

"Oh, fuck you. We're all crying."

Álvaro, gripping his flask, voice hoarse:

"…Senna… meu Deus… obrigado."

Borges, whispering, tail low, ears folded:

"Awoo." (I wasn't ready to love and lose again.)

Angie, sniffling, paw over her heart:

"Awoooo." (He was too beautiful for this world.)

Senna just smiled.

One last time.

One last **impossible**, **heartbreaking**, **legendary** time.

He **shifted gears.**

He **accelerated.**

And just like that—**he was gone.**

Max, voice cracking, staring into the distance where the truck had disappeared.

"We will never know if that really happened."

Maria, wiping her eyes.

"Doesn't matter. It was real to us."

Álvaro, exhaling deeply, taking a long, solemn drink.

"We drank with Senna. We rode with Senna. If I die today, bury me happy."

Silence.

The **wind rippled across the lake.**

The neon lights of the Bar do Cuscuz flickered, waiting.

A new adventure called.

But still—for just one more moment, they stood there.

Because some things deserve to be remembered.

Because some moments are too beautiful to leave too soon.

Because they had been in the presence of a legend.

And for the rest of their lives, they would never be the same.

The doors of the Bar do Cuscuz swung open.

The air was thick with the smell of fried food, cachaça, and stories waiting to be told.

And then—the waiters saw him.

Their eyes went wide.

Their **voices rose in a triumphant chorus.**

"PROFESSOR, WELCOME BACK!"

Max, Maria, and Angie froze.

Max, **blinking rapidly:**

"Wait. Back? You've been here before?"

Maria, **raising an eyebrow:**

"What the hell do they mean your bottles?"

Angie, **ears perking up, tail wagging:**

"Awooo?" (What exactly did you do here, Álvaro?)

Borges, grinning like a dog who already knew the answer:

"Ohhh, you have to see this."

And then—**they entered the bar.**

And the **parade began.**

A **cart rolled out.**

And on it—**a towering mountain of whisky bottles.**

Every **kind.**

Every **age.**

Every **shape and form.**

Bourbon.

Single Malt.

Blended Scotch.

Japanese.

Irish.

Obscure, dangerous-looking unlabeled bottles

smuggled from who-the-fuck-knows-where.

And Then—The Procession.

The entire staff of the Bar do Cuscuz assembled.

Barmen and barwomen.

Waiters and waitresses.

Cooks.

Dishwashers.

Cleaning crew.

They **filed past Álvaro in solemn reverence.**

And as each one passed, **they bowed.**

One by one.

In **awe.**

Max, whispering, watching the scene unfold like some kind of alcohol-fueled religious ceremony:
"What the actual fuck is happening?"

A Waiter, eyes shining with deep respect:

"Professor··· we have kept your bottles safe, as you instructed."

Another Waitress, hand on her heart:

"We have waited for this day."

A Barman, solemn, voice trembling:

"We never drank from them. Not a single drop. As was the sacred oath."

Maria, stunned, turning to Álvaro:

"You have sacred bottles?"

Álvaro, completely unbothered, grinning, rolling up his sleeves like a man about to reunite with long-lost friends:

"Of course I do. What kind of man do you take me for?"

Max, whispering, hoarse:

"A fucking legend, apparently."

And so, the bottles were brought forth.

The **staff gathered around in hushed reverence.**

And Álvaro?

He **picked up a bottle, examined it, smiled, and with the smooth confidence of a man who had conquered both knowledge and vice—**

He **popped it open.**

The Bar do Cuscuz erupted into cheers.

The whisky flowed.

The glasses clinked.

The night was only beginning.

And as the first burning sip touched their tongues,

They knew—

This was exactly where they were meant to be.

The Feast of Bar do Cuscuz Began.

And what a feast it was.

BODE NA BRASA.

LINGUIÇA.

CARNE DE SOL PUXADA NA MANTEIGA.

MACAXEIRA.

CUSCUZ COM NATA.

The **over-calories, over-fat, over-flavor cuisine of the tropics was laid before them in obscene abundance.**

And it was **washed down by rivers of whisky.**

Because **nothing else could match such excess.**

And Álvaro Conducted.

Like a **maestro before a grand orchestra of culinary sin.**

He **orchestrated the meals.**
He **dictated the rhythm of drinking.**
He **oversaw the festival like a high priest of indulgence.**

Max, already halfway through his second plate, eyes rolling back in pleasure:

"This is… this is so good I might cry."

Maria, dipping her macaxeira in the butter-drenched carne de sol, moaning in delight:

"Jesus Christ, this is a religious experience."

Pascal, licking a stolen piece of cuscuz with nata:

"For once, I regret nothing."

Borges and Angie, tearing into hunks of meat, tails wagging like drumsticks:

"Awoo awooo!" (We live here now! We never leave!)

And the **Bar do Cuscuz roared with life.**

The **staff toasted along.**
The **cachaça flowed as freely as the whisky.**
The **air filled with laughter, music, and the kind of happiness that only exists when every single bad decision is the right one.**

Álvaro, raising his glass, standing at the head of the table like a king among vagabonds:

"To the sins of the tropics!"

Max, grinning, raising his own:

"To our arteries, which may not survive the night!"

Maria, wiping her mouth, already refilling her plate:

"To fucking everything!"

And So, The Night Devoured Them.

And they **devoured it back.**

With **forks.**
With **knives.**
With **glasses raised and mouths full.**

Because **this was life.**

Because **this was how it was meant to be.**

Because **this was a night that would burn in their memories forever.**

THE BAR DO CUSCUZ BECAME A TEMPLE.

A **temple of sin.**
A **temple of excess.**
A **temple of whisky, food, music, and reckless, lawless, glorious Brazilian joy.**

And at the center of it all—**Álvaro.**

The **master of ceremonies.**
The **high priest of indulgence.**
The **man who needed no crown, because the people had already named him king.**

Álvaro, standing on the table, arms wide, whisky in one hand, cuscuz in the other, voice roaring through the night:

🎶 "Não existe pecado do lado de baixo do Equador!"

The bar exploded into cheers.

🎶 "Vamos fazer um pecado rasgado, suado, a todo vapor!"

AND THEN, LIKE A WAVE SWEEPING THROUGH THE ROOM—

THE WHOLE BAR.
ARM IN ARM.
SINGING IN A DRUNKEN, EXHILARATED CHOIR:

🎶 "Me deixa ser teu escracho, capacho, teu cacho!"
🎶 "Um riacho de amor!"

THEN—ÁLVARO.

A breathtaking solo.

His voice rose above them all.

A professor of life itself, delivering a lesson no university could ever teach.

🎶 "Quando é lição de esculacho, olha aí, sai de baixo!"
🎶 "Que eu sou professor!"

AND THE BAR WENT WILD.

THE WHOLE ROOM, CHANTING, STOMPING, BANGING ON TABLES:

"PROFESSOR! PROFESSOR! PROFESSOR!"

Max, pounding the table, shaking his head in admiration:
"Dude. DUDE. You are actually a goddamn legend."

Maria, drunkenly throwing an arm around Álvaro's waist, slurring:

"We are not worthy!"

Pascal, from his seat, licking whisky off his paw:

"I mean, I knew that already, but yes. Confirmed."

Borges and Angie, barking along with the chant:

"AWOO! PROFESSOR! AWOO!"

AND THE NIGHT RAGED ON.

Because the bar would not sleep.

Because the whisky would not stop.

Because the song had no end.

Because there was no sin south of the equator.

And if there was—

They would commit it all the same.

AND THEN—A SINGLE, UNSTOPPABLE VOICE ROSE ABOVE THE CHAOS.

A voice **so inevitable, so predictable, so deeply ingrained in the DNA of Brazil itself** that it could have been carved into the bones of the Earth.

A voice that **every drunk, every philosopher, every vagabond, and every goddamn soul south of the equator had heard at least once in their life.**

And then—**all the other patrons of the bar joined in.**

"TOCA RAUUUUUUUL!"

Álvaro did not hesitate.

Álvaro did not question.

Because **he was not a fool.**

Because **he knew what had to be done.**

Because **some orders are sacred.**

And "Toca Raul" is one of them.

Álvaro, raising his glass, roaring over the chaos:

"Barman! Garçom! Cozinha! Todo mundo!"

"WEED FOR THE WHOLE BAR!"

A CHEER SO LOUD IT SHOOK THE WALLS.

Waiters **rushed** to distribute joints as if they were communion wafers.
Cachaça **flowed** as if it had been blessed by the gods themselves.
And a **man in the corner—who had not spoken all night—produced a guitar from the depths of the universe itself.**

And then—

Álvaro took a deep drag from his joint.

And with the authority of a prophet, exhaled a cloud of smoke and declared:

"QUEM NÃO TEM COLÍRIO, USA ÓCULOS ESCUROS!"

AND THE BAR FELL INTO MADNESS.

Tables were turned into drum kits.

Men and women climbed onto chairs, onto bars, onto each other.

Borges and Angie howled in perfect harmony.

Pascal, completely stoned, watched the ceiling like it contained the secrets of the universe.

And then—the music began.

THE NIGHT HAD REACHED A NEW, UNHOLY, TRANSCENDENTAL LEVEL.

They were **no longer in Campina Grande.**
They were **no longer even on Earth.**
They were **floating in the astral plane, surfing the waves of the cosmos, guided only by whisky, weed, and the voice of Raul Seixas.**

AND NOTHING—NOT EVEN THE INQUISITOR—COULD STOP THEM NOW.

AND THEN MARIA—DRUNK, HIGH, AND FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF BRAZIL—

PULLED OUT HER PHONE.

She **Googled.**

She **found the lyrics.**

And with the **confidence of a woman who has made many, many bad decisions before and will continue to do so until the end of time…**

She **stood up, raised her arms, and began to sing.**

Maria, in an absolutely atrocious Portuguese, but perfectly in tune:

🎶 **"Eu lembro da moça bonita!"**
🎶 **"Da praia de Boa Viagem!"**
🎶 **"E a moça no meio da tarde!"**
🎶 **"De um domingo azul!"**

THE BAR FELL SILENT.

Max, whispering to Álvaro:

"Oh no."

Álvaro, taking a deep, dramatic sip of whisky:

"Oh yes."

But Maria did not falter.

She **did not waver.**

She **was a woman possessed.**

Her **drunken, absurdly beautiful, horrifically mispronounced Portuguese carried through the room like a hurricane with a broken GPS.**

Maria, eyes closed, voice soaring:

🎶 **"Azul era Belle de Jour!"**

🎶 **"Era a bela da tarde!"**

🎶 **"Seus olhos azuis como a tarde!"**

🎶 **"Na tarde de um domingo azul!"**

🎶 **"La Belle de Jour!"**

And Then—

The **Bar do Cuscuz erupted.**

A CHORUS OF DRUNKEN BRAZILIANS,
ROARING IN RESPONSE:

🎶 **"LA BELLE DE JOUUUUUUUUUUUR!"**

THE ROOM WAS SHAKING.

People **pounded tables, clapped, whistled, and howled.**
A **man cried into his beer, deeply moved by this absolute disaster of a performance.**
The **guitarist, now crying himself, strummed with the power of a thousand suns.**

And **then—as if possessed by the true spirit of Brazilian madness—**

THE ENTIRE BAR JOINED HER.

Maria had become one with Brazil.

And **Brazil, in all its chaotic, drunken, poetic glory, had embraced her back.**

Max, stunned, wiping a tear:

"Jesus Christ, she pulled it off."

Álvaro, clinking glasses with him, smiling:

"Welcome to the tropics, my friend."

And with that—

THE NIGHT CONTINUED.

Because **in Brazil, the music never truly stops.**
Because **the whisky never truly dries up.**
Because **the fire in their souls could never be extinguished.**

Not tonight.

Not ever.

Angie, eyes gleaming, nudging Borges with her paw:

"Do a classic!"

Borges, grinning like a legend who knew his moment had arrived:

"Hold my chopp."

He took a deep breath.
He stood on his hind legs.

And **with the poise of a true artist, he sang.**

Borges, deep and soulful:

🎶 "Sou filho único!"

🎶 "Tenho minha casa pra olhar!"

🎶 "Não posso ficar!"

AND THEN—LIKE A WAVE SWEEPING
THROUGH THE CITY—

THE **WHOLE BAR.**
THE **WHOLE STREET.**
THE **WHOLE GODDAMN CITY OF CAMPINA GRANDE.**

ROARED IN RESPONSE:

🎶 "SOU FILHO ÚNICO!"

🎶 "TENHO MINHA CASA PRA OLHAR!"

🎶 "NÃO POSSO FICAR!"

AND IT DIDN'T STOP THERE.

The **music poured into the streets.**
The **restaurants. The gas stations. The bus stops. The rooftops.**
A **chorus so powerful it shook the palm trees.**

The **bartenders clinked glasses with the cooks.**
The **cooks hugged the waitresses.**
The **waitresses grabbed customers by the arm and spun them in impromptu dances.**

Even **the police officers driving by stopped, rolled down their windows, and joined in.**

Maria, raising a beer in absolute triumph:

"THIS COUNTRY IS INSANE AND I LOVE IT!"

Max, gripping Álvaro's shoulders, overwhelmed:

"Your dog just started a city-wide choir!"

Álvaro, nodding, taking a long sip of whisky:

"Yes. And?"

Borges howled.

And **the entire city howled with him.**

Because **this was Brazil.**
Because **this was music.**
Because **this was life.**

And **Campina Grande would never be the same.**

They Were Not in Panacea Anymore.

The following morning, the **hangover hit.**

And not just any hangover—**a hangover of *military proportions*.**

A **hangover so profound, so absolute, that it could have been classified as an act of war.**

The **kind of hangover that makes you reconsider every life choice that led you here.**

The **kind of hangover that makes you question the fabric of reality itself.**

Max, groaning, clutching his head:

"Holy shit, did I get hit by a train?"

Maria, buried under a pillow, voice muffled:

"I think we got hit by God's disappointment."

Pascal, barely alive, sprawled across Maria's stomach:

"Everything hurts, and I don't even drink."

Borges, lying on his back, paws over his eyes:

"Awoo…" (Mercy… please… mercy…)

Angie, snout buried in her paws:

"Awoooo⋯" (I regret nothing but I am suffering.)

But **Álvaro knew better.**

Álvaro had *been here before*.

Because **a man does not live a life of debauchery without mastering the sacred art of survival.**

And so—**like a general leading his broken soldiers back to life,**

Álvaro distributed the holy sacraments.

ENGOV.

A **golden tablet of salvation.**

"Take it, you cowards."

NOVALGINA.

A liquid miracle, sent by the gods to wipe away pain.

"Drink it. No whining. No excuses."

And Then—The Breakfast of Redemption.

A table so magnificent, so full of life, that it could resurrect the dead.

Carne seca na nata, hot and creamy, melting on their tongues.

Tapioca, soft and comforting, like a warm embrace for their broken souls.

Cuscuz, fluffy and golden, a food so pure it should be worshipped.

Pão de queijo, still steaming, little bites of divine forgiveness.

Papaya, glowing orange, vitamins forcing their way into their ruined bodies.

Overripe pineapple, so sweet it burned their tongues, shocking them back to life.

Max, taking his first bite, eyes wide in pure, overwhelming gratitude:

"Álvaro, I swear to God, if I wasn't straight, I'd marry you."

Maria, stuffing pão de queijo into her mouth:

"You're only straight because you haven't tried hard enough."

Pascal, licking papaya juice off his paw:

"I am reborn."

Borges, eyes still half-closed, weakly wagging his tail:

"Awooo?" (Is this what salvation tastes like?)

Angie, sitting up, blinking, whispering in awe:

"Awoooo…" (…Brazil is too powerful.)

And So, Slowly, They Lived Again.

The **pain eased.**

The **fog lifted.**

The **world made sense once more.**

And as the **warm morning sun shone over Campina Grande,**

They knew—

They had survived one more night in Brazil.

Álvaro, The Untouchable.

While **his companions sat broken, barely clinging to the fragile remains of their existence,**

While **hangovers raged through their bodies like a biblical plague,**

While even Borges and Angie, mighty dogs of the tropics, whimpered in silent suffering,

Álvaro was untouched.

Because hangovers do not touch gods.

Because a lifetime of excess had forged him into something beyond mere mortals.

And so—he squeezed a fresh lemon into a glass of cachaça.

Took a slow, deliberate sip.

Let it burn down his throat like holy fire.

And then, completely unaffected, he said—

"So... Avignon?"

EVERYONE ELSE, IN A MISERABLE,
HUNGOVER CHOIR:

"OH, FUCK YOU."

Álvaro, shrugging, unfazed, taking another sip:

"Fair enough."

And just like that—**he poured himself another.**

Álvaro, Still Unshaken.

While **his companions clung to life like shipwrecked sailors on the debris of a glorious but catastrophic night,**

While **heads pounded, stomachs churned, and reality felt like a cruel joke,**

While **even Pascal, usually composed in his feline indifference, muttered curses under his breath,**

Álvaro remained untouchable.

He downed his cachaça.

He squeezed fresh lemon into his glass.

And with the confidence of a man who had never once regretted a single drink,

He sang.

Álvaro, voice steady, rich, full of cachaça and defiance:

🎶 "Com a marvada pinga, é que eu me atrapaio!"

🎶 "Eu entro na venda e já dou meu taio!"

🎶 "Pego no copo e dali num saio!"

🎶 "Ali memo eu bebo, ali memo eu caio!"

🎶 "Só pra carregar é que eu dô trabaio!"

THE BAR GROANED IN RESPONSE.

Max, forehead on the table, waving a weak hand:

"Someone shut him up. Please. Mercy."

Maria, clutching an Engov packet like a rosary:

"If you sing one more note, Álvaro, I swear to God I will vomit directly onto your shoes."

Pascal, staring at the ceiling, dead inside:

"I have lived too long."

Borges, ears flattened, eyes barely open:

"Awoo..." (Make it stop...)

Angie, whimpering, licking her own nose to stay alive:

"Awoooo..." (This is the price we pay for our sins...)

Álvaro, grinning, raising his glass:

"Then next time, my friends··· drink more."

And with that, he threw back another shot.

Because **hangovers are for the weak.**

And **Álvaro Diderot was *not weak.***

Álvaro, The Unbreakable, The Unholy Messiah of Excess.

He **stood tall.**
He **stood strong.**
He **stood victorious over the battlefield of his fallen, suffering comrades.**

And **he raised his glass.**

"QUEM NÃO SABE BEBER, BEBE LEITE, MY FRIENDS!"

Groans of agony echoed across the table.

Max, barely lifting his head:
"Why are you like this?"

Maria, holding her cachaça like it was poison instead of salvation:

"Shut the fuck up, Álvaro."

Pascal, whispering to no one in particular:

"I will kill God for this."

Borges, covering his eyes with his paws, ears flattened against his skull:

"Awooooo…" (He's trying to kill us all…)

Angie, curled into a miserable ball:

"Awooo…" (No more… no more…)

Álvaro, undeterred, poured another round.

His eyes burned with the light of a man who knew the only true cure for a hangover—

Was more alcohol.

He grinned like a demon, like a prophet, like a force of nature itself.

And he slammed his hand on the table.

"A RESSACA PRECISA SER RE-BATIDA!"

He grabbed his glass.

He downed it in one brutal, magnificent gulp.

And then—he pointed at them all.

At Max, who wanted to die.

At Maria, who wanted him to die.

At Pascal, Borges, Angie—who simply wanted this day to cease existing.

And he issued the command.

The only command that mattered.

"DRINK, FRIENDS! DRINK!"

Silence.

A long, heavy pause.

Then—**slowly, painfully, unwillingly—**

One by one, **they lifted their glasses.**

Faces pale. Hands trembling. Souls broken.

They **drank.**

Because **Álvaro had spoken.**

And **his word was law.**

THE HAIR OF THE DOG.

AND SUDDENLY—LIFE RETURNED.

The **first sip burned.**

The **second sip tingled.**

The **third sip?**

SALVATION.

Max, blinking, lifting his head, suddenly remembering how to be a human being again:

"Oh··· oh shit··· it's working."

Maria, taking a deep breath, rolling her shoulders, stretching her neck:

"Jesus Christ. I can feel my blood again."

Pascal, licking his paw, tail flicking, voice dry but no longer dead inside:

"I hate that this works."

Borges, ears perking, tail wagging, the fog of suffering lifting from his mind:
"Awoo?" (Are we··· alive?)

Angie, shaking out her fur, letting out a long, victorious howl:
"AWOOOO!" (I AM RESTORED! I AM WHOLE! I AM DOG AGAIN!)

AND THEN—THEY WERE BACK.

Max slammed his glass down.

Maria called for more cachaça.

Pascal stretched like a king in the sun.

Borges and Angie wrestled on the floor, tails wagging like flags of triumph.

And Álvaro?

He just smirked, leaned back in his chair, and raised his glass in silent acknowledgment.

Because he already knew.

Because he had led them through the darkness.

Because he was Álvaro Diderot, and he feared no vice.

THEY WERE ALIVE AGAIN.

And Campina Grande was not ready for what came next.

Álvaro: The Vatican. The Fall. The Memory.

Álvaro leaned back in his chair.

He took a slow, deliberate sip of cachaça.

Max, **eyes narrowing, watching him carefully, pressed again.**

Max:

"How did you destroy the original Vatican in the first place?"

Álvaro smirked.

He **looked at Borges.**

He **looked at Pascal.**

They **looked back at him.**

A **silent understanding passed between them.**

Because **only they knew.**

Because **only they *remembered*.**

Borges, licking his paw, staring into the distance:

"It was…" (A glorious mess.)

Pascal, sighing, flicking his tail:

"It was…" (An absolute disaster.)

Álvaro, voice calm, measured, but carrying the weight of history itself:

"It was inevitable."

Maria, impatient, rolling her eyes:

"Can you not do the cryptic bullshit and just tell us?"

Álvaro, chuckling, setting his glass down, finally speaking:

"It started with a conspiracy. A Vatican-led conspiracy to control reality itself."

"They thought they could manipulate the nature of existence. Rewrite the very laws of the universe."

"We had other ideas."

Max, leaning in, intrigued:

"And?"

Álvaro, voice low, dangerous, filled with the memory of chaos itself:

"So we introduced Anti-Cool into their air conditioning system."

Max, blinking:

"You… what?"

Maria, completely lost:

"I'm sorry, what the fuck does that even mean?"

Borges, eyes gleaming with nostalgia:

"We inverted their essence."

Pascal, sighing, shaking his head:

"We made the Vatican… uncool."

Max, eyes widening as the realization dawned:

"You erased them? Just like that?"

Álvaro, pouring himself another drink, nodding slowly:

"They could not exist in a world where they were no longer the ultimate authority. The moment we removed their Cool, the institution collapsed under its own weight."

"Reality did not need them anymore. And so—"

He snapped his fingers.

"—they ceased to be."

Silence.

The **bar, once filled with chaos and music, now seemed eerily quiet.**

Max **exhaled, rubbing his forehead.**

Maria **took a long drink, processing.**

Max, finally:

"So… let me get this straight. You didn't use bombs. You didn't use armies. You didn't hack their servers or infiltrate their intelligence network."

"You just… made them lame?"

Álvaro, grinning, raising his glass:

"Correct."

Max, sitting back, shaking his head, letting out a stunned laugh:

"That is the most insane thing I have ever heard in my life."

Maria, after a long pause, raising her drink in reluctant admiration:

"I hate to say it··· but that's genius."

Pascal, flicking his tail smugly:

"Of course it was. It was our plan."

Borges, nodding, wagging his tail:

"Awooo." (It was beautiful.)

Álvaro, leaning forward, his smile fading slightly:

"But Avignon? That means they adapted. That means they found a way to survive. That means—"

He downed his cachaça.

"—they have learned. And they will not make the same mistake again."

Max, suddenly serious:

"So… what's the plan now?"

Álvaro, wiping his mouth, exhaling deeply, voice calm but carrying the weight of what was to come:

"We go south, my friends."

"Because if there is no sin below the equator—"

"—then neither can there be a Pope."

And just like that, the war was back on.

Maria, narrowing her eyes, sipping her cachaça:

"So··· what's their next step? Should we expect the Spanish Inquisition?"

EVERYBODY ELSE.

THE WHOLE BAR.

THE WHOLE CITY OF CAMPINA GRANDE.

🎶 "NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION!" 🎶

Silence.

Then—a door slammed open.

And three men in bright red robes burst in, dramatic as all hell.

"NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION!"

Max dropped his glass.
Maria stared in pure disbelief.
Borges and Angie froze mid-tail-wag.
Pascal, horrified, whispered, *"Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me."*

The lead inquisitor took a step forward, pointing a dramatic, accusatory finger.

"Our chief weapon is surprise!"

"Surprise and fear!"

"Fear and surprise!"

"And ruthless efficiency!"

"Wait—our *four* weapons are—"

"Oh, for fuck's sake," Álvaro muttered, downing another shot.

He stood up **like a man who had dealt with this bullshit one too many times.**

The room waited.

And then—**Álvaro simply said:**

"Guys."

The **three inquisitors froze.**

Álvaro, sighing, rubbing his temples:

"We literally just predicted this exact moment."

A Long, Painful Pause.

The **inquisitors looked at each other.**
The **crowd of Campina Grande blinked.**

Even **the cows outside seemed vaguely disappointed.**

Maria, arms crossed, deadpan:

"Not very efficient of you."

Max, shaking his head:

"For an organization that prides itself on surprise, you guys sure are predictable."

Pascal, flicking his tail, sighing:

"Embarrassing, really."

Borges, ears flattened in disappointment:

"Awoooo." (You had one job.)

The lead inquisitor clenched his fists, looking deeply offended.

"You don't understand!"

"You were NOT supposed to EXPECT US!"

Álvaro, pouring himself another drink, utterly unfazed:

"And yet, here we are."

Silence.

Then—one of the junior inquisitors leaned in,
whispering to the lead inquisitor:

"Do we still… do we still do the whole thing?"

Maria, sighing, rubbing her eyes:

"Just… just get on with it, guys."

And So, the Spanish Inquisition Continued.

Despite a rocky start.
Despite having been completely expected.
Despite the deeply disappointed expressions of
every single person in Campina Grande.

They went through their routine.

But now, even they weren't sure why.

THE MOST HALF-HEARTED INQUISITION IN HISTORY

The three inquisitors shuffled awkwardly, clearing their throats.

They adjusted their red robes.

They exchanged nervous glances.

And then, with all the enthusiasm of a substitute teacher forced to lecture a classroom of drunk philosophers,

The lead inquisitor attempted to regain control of the moment.

"AHEM!"

"VERY WELL!"

He pointed dramatically at Álvaro.

"YOU ARE ALL ACCUSED OF HERESY!"

The whole bar, deadpan:

"Uh-huh."

Maria, sipping her cachaça:

"Cool, cool. And what exactly did we do?"

The lead inquisitor, flipping through a very official-looking parchment:

"Let's see… uh…"

He squinted.

He turned the parchment sideways.

He frowned deeply.

The junior inquisitor, helpfully leaning over his shoulder:

"Says here… excessive drunkenness, immoral debauchery, and defiling the Holy See."

Max, raising an eyebrow:

"The Holy See? That doesn't exist anymore."

Álvaro, grinning, swirling his glass:

"Yeah, we made it very uncool, remember?"

Borges, ears perking up:

"Awoo!" (Technically, we erased it from reality!)

Pascal, yawning:

"Honestly, it was their own fault."

The inquisitors exchanged uncomfortable glances.

The **lead inquisitor coughed.**

"RIGHT! WELL! BE THAT AS IT MAY!"

"YOU ARE STILL GUILTY OF DEBAUCHERY!"

Maria, completely unfazed, sipping her drink:
"Okay, and? What's the punishment?"

The lead inquisitor grinned, regaining some confidence.

He **snapped his fingers.**

Two other inquisitors dragged a large, ancient wooden chest into the middle of the bar.

The crowd of Campina Grande leaned in, watching with curiosity.

The chest creaked open.

And from inside…

They pulled out…

A large, tattered, *ugly as hell*…

"THE COMFY CHAIR!"

Silence.

A long, heavy, deeply unimpressed silence.

Then—Maria burst out laughing.

Maria, wiping away tears:

"You're gonna TORTURE us··· with a chair?"

Max, holding up a finger, dead serious:

"No, no. Not just any chair. A comfy chair."

Álvaro, nodding solemnly:

"Truly, the horrors of medieval Catholicism know no bounds."

Borges and Angie, whispering to each other:

"Awoo?" (Do they think this is intimidating?)
"Awoooo." (I think they're serious.)

Pascal, flicking his tail, unimpressed:

"You do realize we've survived Carolina Reaper sauce, bottom-shelf bourbon, and Brazilian afterlife hangovers, right?"

The inquisitors hesitated.

They **looked at each other.**

The **crowd was watching them, unimpressed, drinks in hand.**

It was…

Not going as planned.

The junior inquisitor, whispering:

"Uh, boss? This… this doesn't seem to be working."

The lead inquisitor, whispering back:

"Shut up, Miguel, we trained for this!"

Maria, smirking, crossing her arms:

"Alright then. Put me in the comfy chair. Let's see what happens."

Max, raising his glass, grinning:

"Yeah, me too. Maybe it's got lumbar support?"

Álvaro, standing up, arms wide, voice grand and theatrical:

"Sirs, I volunteer! Torture me with your unholy upholstery!"

The inquisitors, now completely out of their depth, stared at the crowd.

The crowd stared back.

The entire city of Campina Grande waited.

And then—the lead inquisitor sighed.

"Goddammit."

He turned to his fellow inquisitors.

He slumped forward, hands on his knees.

"I *told* you guys this was a dumb plan!"

The junior inquisitor frowned.

"Well, what were we *supposed* to do? The Pope was screaming at us to find a solution!"

Álvaro, grinning:

"Oh, Avignon sent you? Cute."

Maria, sipping her drink:

"So what now, boys? You gonna excommunicate us?"

The lead inquisitor, rubbing his temples, groaning:

"Ugh. I don't know, man. I think we have to report back."

Max leaned in, smirking.

"So what you're saying is—"

"We won?"

The inquisitor sighed, defeated.

"Yeah. You won."

The whole bar, the whole city of Campina Grande:

"YEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!"

And just like that—the Spanish Inquisition packed up their comfy chair and sulked out of the bar.

As the party started up again, as the whisky flowed, as Borges and Angie howled in victory, as Pascal stretched in smug satisfaction—

Álvaro poured himself another drink.

And with a smirk, he raised his glass to the night.

Because the battle was won.

But the war for Avignon was just beginning.

A Note, Sponsored by the Council for Culture of the Municipality of Campina Grande, for Its Own Citizens:

Shhhhh.

Está tudo bem.

Relaxa.

Here's some forró music.

Here's some cachaça.

Here's a hammock under the shade.

Forget the Spanish Inquisition.

Forget Avignon.

Forget everything.

Just **breathe.**

Just **dance.**

Just **drink.**

Everything **is fine.**

Everything **is always fine.**

Because **you are in Campina Grande.**

And **Campina Grande always takes care of its own.**

The Caatinga and the Lumberjacks

Álvaro, standing on a table, arms wide, voice
booming over the crowd of Campina Grande:

"My friends! You don't have trees in the Caatinga."

"But do you know what a forest is?"

The Crowd, shouting back in chorus:

"Many trees all together!"

Álvaro, nodding solemnly:

"Right! And do you know who cuts those trees down?"

The Crowd, blinking, confused:

"Nope!"

Max, stepping forward, grinning, raising his glass:

"It's the lumberjacks!"

And Then—Maria.

Because **Maria knew exactly what had to be done.**

Because **there are moments in life where only one response is correct.**

And **this was one of those moments.**

She **climbed onto the bar, threw her arms in the air, and let her voice ring through the night.**

Maria, dramatically, with full theatrical energy:

🎶 "LEAPING FROM TREE TO TREE AS THEY FLOAT DOWN!"
🎶 "THE MIGHTY RIVERS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA!"

The crowd paused.

They **blinked.**
They **looked at each other.**
They **were confused.**

Álvaro, grinning, nodding to her, raising his glass:

"Carry on, Maria. Carry on."

Maria, undeterred, continuing, full Monty Python energy:

🎶 "THE GIANT REDWOOD, THE LARCH, THE FIR, THE MIGHTY SCOTS PINE!"
🎶 "THE LOFTY FLOWERING CHERRY, THE PLUCKY LITTLE ASPEN!"
🎶 "THE LIMPING ROO TREE OF NIGERIA!"
🎶 "THE TOWERING WATTLE OF ALDERSHOT!"

Max, now drunk enough to join in, throwing his arm around Álvaro:

🎶 "THE MAIDENHEAD WEEPING WATER PLANT!"

Borges, howling in rhythm, tail wagging:

🎶 "AWOOOO!" *(THE NAUGHTY LEICESTERSHIRE FLASHING OAK!)*

Pascal, rolling his eyes but playing along, swishing his tail in time:

🎶 "THE FLATULENT ELM OF WEST RUISLIP!"

Angie, now fully committed, jumping onto a chair, barking along:

🎶 "THE QUERCUS MAXIMUS BAMBER GASCOIGNI!"

The Entire Bar, Confused but Enthusiastic, Joining in Regardless:

🎶 **"THE EPIGILLUS! THE BARTER HUGHUS GREENUS!"**

And Then—Silence.

The **people of Campina Grande stared.**

Their **minds tried to process what had just happened.**

And then—**one man, in the back, hesitantly raised his drink.**

"…TO THE LUMBERJACKS?"

The Entire Bar, Roaring Back in Chaos:

"TO THE LUMBERJACKS!"

Glasses clinked. Shots were downed. People cheered.

And just like that—**the Monty Python Lumberjack Song had officially reached Brazil.**

CAMPINA GRANDE DESCENDS INTO CHAOS.

Álvaro, Max, and Maria, now fully possessed by the spirit of the lumberjack, stood on the bar, leading the charge.

And as the **whole city of Campina Grande** looked on, confused but eager,

They sang.

ALL TOGETHER NOW:

🎶 "I'M A LUMBERJACK, AND I'M OKAY!"
🎶 "I SLEEP ALL NIGHT AND I WORK ALL DAY!"

🎶 "HE'S A LUMBERJACK, AND HE'S OKAY!"
🎶 "HE SLEEPS ALL NIGHT AND HE WORKS ALL DAY!"

And then Max, fully embracing his role as leader of the absurd, stepped forward, one foot on a chair, chest puffed out like a hero.

Max, with an exaggerated, heroic voice:

🎶 "I CUT DOWN TREES! I EAT MY LUNCH!"
🎶 "I GO TO THE LAVATORY!"
🎶 "ON WEDNESDAYS I GO SHOPPING—"
🎶 "AND HAVE BUTTERED SCONES FOR TEA!"

The Entire Bar, The Entire Street, The Entire City,
Now Fully Committed:

🎶 "HE CUTS DOWN TREES! HE EATS HIS LUNCH!"
🎶 "HE GOES TO THE LAVATORY!"
🎶 "ON WEDNESDAYS HE GOES SHOPPING—"
🎶 "AND HAS BUTTERED SCONES FOR TEA!"

CAMPINA GRANDE HAD NEVER
EXPERIENCED SUCH CHAOS.

Waiters carried trays like shields.
Cooks waved kitchen knives in the air like battle flags.
An old man with a harmonica somehow appeared and started playing along.

A **random woman stood up on a table and flashed the room—because, well, this was Brazil.**

Borges and Angie, spinning in circles, barking in perfect harmony:

🎶 **"AWOOO! AWOOO!"** *(LUMBERJACKS! LUMBERJACKS!)*

Pascal, dramatically flicking his tail, sighing:

"I cannot believe I am here for this."

Maria, swinging her drink in rhythm, shouting at the crowd:

"CAMPINA GRANDE! DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO?!"

The Crowd, screaming back in a frenzy:

"TOCA RAUUUUUUUUUUL!"

And just like that—**Raul Seixas music was blasted from unseen speakers, fireworks exploded from some guy's backyard, the cachaça flowed even harder, and Campina Grande entered its final, ultimate form:**

TOTAL. ANARCHY.

Álvaro, turning to Max and Maria, grinning like the devil himself:

"My friends··· I think we have officially broken Brazil."

And then, as if the gods themselves were watching,

A shooting star streaked across the sky.

And for a brief, fleeting moment…

All was right in the universe.

TOCA RAUUUUUUUUL!

AND SO IT BEGAN.

The first chords rang through the night, electric and divine.

The cachaça-fueled chaos of Campina Grande froze—

Not in silence—but in reverence.

This was not just music.
This was not just a song.

This was a rite, a sacred invocation, a moment in history.

The city inhaled—

And then, in one voice, **they roared.**

Álvaro, arms open, head thrown back, preaching to the stars:

🎶 "ENQUANTO VOCÊ SE ESFORÇA PRA SER"
🎶 "UM SUJEITO NORMAL E FAZER TUDO IGUAL"

Max, clutching his chest like the lyrics physically struck him in the soul:

🎶 "EU DO MEU LADO APRENDENDO A SER LOUCO"
🎶 "UM MALUCO TOTAL, NA LOUCURA REAL!"

Maria, standing on the bar, beer sloshing over the edges of her glass, eyes wide in absolute, pure transcendence:

🎶 "CONTROLANDO A MINHA MALUQUEZ"
🎶 "MISTURADA COM MINHA LUCIDEZ!"

AND THEN—THE DROP.

THE WHOLE CITY OF CAMPINA GRANDE, IN RELIGIOUS ECSTASY:

🎶 "VOU FICAR!"
🎶 "FICAR COM CERTEZA!"
🎶 "MALUCO BELEZA!"

Borges, howling in tune, tail wagging so fast it was a blur:

🎶 "AWOOOOO!" *(MALUCO BELEZA!)*

Angie, spinning in circles, barking wildly:

🎶 "AWOOO!" *(MALUCO BELEZA!)*

Pascal, exhaling deeply, staring up at the sky, finally accepting that he was, in fact, part of this madness:

🎶 "Eu vou ficar!" *(Fuck it. Fine. I'm in.)*
🎶 "Ficar com certeza!" *(I surrender to the insanity.)*
🎶 "Maluco beleza!" *(At least they have good music.)*

AND CAMPINA GRANDE—OH, CAMPINA GRANDE—HAD NEVER BEEN MORE ALIVE.

People climbed onto tables, dancing as if possessed by the gods of rock and cachaça.

The waiters poured shots directly into open mouths, baptizing the faithful.

A man—no one knew from where—lit a firework and sent it screaming into the heavens.

A woman kissed another woman, and then they both kissed a random guy, because why the hell not?

Álvaro, raising his glass, whispering like a man in divine communion:

"We are eternal, my friends."

Max, wiping away a tear:

"We did it. We really fucking did it."

Maria, slamming her fist on the bar, demanding more booze:

"MORE! KEEP IT GOING! CAMPINA GRANDE WILL NEVER SLEEP AGAIN!"

And So, the Madness Continued.

The **music roared.**
The **whisky flowed.**
The **world spun wildly, gloriously, beautifully out of control.**

Because **this was Brazil.**

Because **this was Raul.**

Because **this was the night they became legends.**

The Carnival Marched On—But the War Was Just Beginning.

The city **roared** with music, cachaça, and pure Brazilian madness.

A **tsunami of revelers** swept through the streets, drums pounding, bodies moving, people singing in the wild ecstasy of **Raul Seixas and the gods of debauchery.**

But **our heroes stayed.**

As **fireworks exploded overhead** and as the last echoes of *Maluco Beleza* faded into the night, Álvaro Diderot stood tall, unshaken.

He **slammed his empty glass on the table.**

He **looked around at his companions—hungover, half-drunk, some still chewing on pieces of carne seca.**

And then—**like a general rallying his troops before battle—**

"GUYS!"

Silence.

Even Borges and Angie stopped their playful wrestling.

Maria, still high, **squinted at him.**
Max, halfway through pouring another drink, **froze.**
Pascal, licking his paw, **sighed.**

Álvaro, with the gravity of a man who has destroyed a holy empire before:

"Focus."

"Regroup."

"Brainstorm."

He leaned forward, his voice lowering.

"Avignon. What's our next move?"

Silence.

A **heavy pause.**

The **whispers of the night air.**

The **faint, distant sound of samba drums echoing from downtown.**

And then—

Max, blinking:

"Wait. We actually have to plan something?"

Maria, groaning, rubbing her temples:

"Fuck. I was hoping we could just drink our way through this."

Pascal, flicking his tail, dry as ever:

"Isn't that exactly how you destroyed the first Vatican?"

Borges, wagging his tail, hopeful:

"Awooo?" (Are we doing more chaos?)

Angie, ears perking up:

"Awoooo!" (Yes! Plan! Plan!)

Álvaro just smirked.

He **poured himself another glass of cachaça.**

He **took a long sip.**

And then—**calm, knowing, utterly fearless—**

"My friends… we're going to need more hot sauce."

And just like that—

the war for Avignon had begun.

THE VIAL. THE SECRET WEAPON. THE BIG BOOM.

Max dug into his pocket.

Past some loose tobacco.
Past a questionable half-melted weed edible.
Past a receipt for a burrito he barely remembered.

And then—his fingers closed around something.

He pulled it out. Held it up to the light.

A tiny glass vial.

A label, handwritten in Latin.

"AQUA BENEDICTA—HIGHLY CONCENTRATED."

The room went still.

Álvaro **snatched it from his hand, eyes gleaming.**

He turned it over, examining it.

And then, **with pure admiration,** he turned to Max—

"Max, you beautiful lunatic!"

"You *kept it*?"

"You're a *genius*!"

Everyone else, still lost in the madness:

"HUH?"

Álvaro, pacing, thinking, running his fingers over the vial:

"This… this might be… a vial of Cool."

"Or…"

"Or a vial of Anti-Cool."

"Either way—IT IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS IN UNCAPABLE HANDS."

Max, blinking:

"Uh… define uncapable?"

Álvaro, still pacing, waving the vial wildly:

"Listen to me very carefully. Cool? Fine. Anti-Cool? Fine."

"But if Cool touches Anti-Cool—"

He stopped.

He turned to them, dead serious.

"BIG. BOOM."

Silence.

A long, tense pause.

The distant sound of a stray firework going off somewhere in the city.

A single mosquito buzzing in the corner of the room.

And then—Maria, rubbing her temples, exhaling deeply:

"Why the *fuck* do we always end up with something apocalyptic in our pockets?"

Pascal, sighing, tail flicking:

"It's honestly becoming predictable."

Borges, ears perking up:

"Awoo?" (So… what do we do with it?)

Angie, wagging her tail, excited:

"Awoooo!" (Do we lick it?)

Max, staring at the tiny, seemingly harmless vial in Álvaro's hand:

"So… you're saying… we're holding a Vatican-grade nuclear bomb?"

Álvaro, grinning, spinning the vial between his fingers like a coin:

"In a way, yes."

"And my friends—"

He looked at each of them, smirking.

"—I think we just figured out how to destroy Avignon."

And Just Like That—

THE FINAL WAR BEGAN.

THE TEST.

The room held its breath.

Álvaro held the vial.

The tiny glass container, filled with the unknown essence of Vatican alchemy,

The most dangerous liquid in their possession.

Álvaro, grinning:

"Only one way to find out."

He uncorked the vial.

A whisper of something—almost like Gregorian chanting—escaped into the air.

He dipped a single fingertip inside.

He raised it to his lips.

He barely—just barely—wet the tip of his tongue.

SILENCE.

Everyone watched.

Max leaned in.

Maria crossed her arms, tense.

Borges and Angie stood alert, tails frozen.

Pascal sighed, already exhausted by whatever was about to happen.

AND THEN···

A pause.

A flicker.

A shift in reality itself.

The bar doors BURST OPEN.

Women **from the streets of Campina Grande—

**locals, tourists, foreigners, even a nun—

RUSHED IN.

Eyes **wild.**

Hands **outstretched.**

All **fixated on one man.**

WOMEN, IN UNISON:

"DANCE WITH ME!"

"KISS ME!"

"LOOK AT ME!"

"OH MEU DEUS, QUEM É ESSE HOMEM???"

Álvaro, barely reacting, tilting his head, smirking:

"Ah. Cool."

The women descended upon him.

Maria, groaning, rubbing her face:

"Oh, for fuck's sake."

Max, laughing his ass off:

"IT'S COOL! IT'S COOL AS FUCK!"

Pascal, closing his eyes, whispering to himself:

"This is going to be so unbearable."

The bar turned into a scene out of a 1950s romance musical.

Women fought to dance with Álvaro.

A samba band materialized out of nowhere.

The bartender popped a bottle of champagne in pure celebration.

Max, raising his glass:

"Well, folks, it looks like we've got ourselves a weapon of mass seduction."

Maria, arms crossed, glaring:

"So how the fuck does this help us destroy Avignon?"

Álvaro, barely audible through the chaos, being lifted into the air by adoring fans:

"We'll figure it out!"

And just like that—

the fate of the Vatican rested in the hands of a man too Cool to fail.

THE DANCE THAT WASN'T A DANCE.

Álvaro snapped his fingers.

And just like that—

All the women froze.

Their breath hitched.
Their eyes wide, lips parted.
Their bodies locked mid-motion, caught in the gravitational pull of his presence.

Silence.

And then—Álvaro pointed.

One woman.

Just **one.**

A simple **gesture.**

A silent **command.**

She **stepped forward.**

Not rushing.

Not hesitating.

Just **moving.**

She **stopped in front of him.**

And **without a word, he took her into his arms.**

It was not a dance.

They **did not move.**

They **just… existed.**

Bodies **pressed together.**

Breath **shared.**

A moment **stretched into eternity.**

And **then—**

He **kissed her.**

FROM A JUKEBOX THAT NEVER EXISTED BEFORE:

🎶 **"I found my thriiiiill…"**

🎶 **"On Blueberry Hiiiiiill…"**

Max, blinking:

"Okay. That's… actually impressive."

Maria, crossing her arms:

"Of course the Vatican had a secret weapon for seduction."

Pascal, sighing deeply:

"Why am I even surprised at this point?"

THE WOMEN WATCHED IN REVERENCE.

This **was not just attraction.**

This **was not just power.**

This **was Cool—**in its purest form.**

This **was a force that could break hearts, topple empires, and bend reality.**

And then—Álvaro pulled back.

He **looked at the woman in his arms.**

She **was shaking.**

Not from fear.

From **being so close to something larger than life itself.**

He whispered, voice like smooth whiskey:

"Thank you, minha querida."

And he **let her go.**

She **staggered back, dazed.**

The **crowd exhaled.**

And then—**the room came alive again.**

Max, smirking, raising his glass:

"So, boss, what's next? You seduce Avignon to death?"

Álvaro, swirling the vial between his fingers, thinking:

"Hmm··· interesting idea."

And just like that—Avignon was in trouble.

STRATEGY SHIFT.

Pascal, leaping onto the table, flicking his tail, voice sharp as a dagger:

"Focus, people. Focus."

The **room snapped back to reality.**

The **women, still breathless, took a step back.**
The **jukebox faded into nothingness.**
The **glow of Cool pulsed, then settled.**

Pascal, pacing, eyes glinting:

"We already played the Cool–Anti-Cool card with the Vatican in Rome."

"In Avignon, they know that. They remember what happened."

"They are prepared this time."

"We cannot just waltz in and make them uncool."

Maria, raising an eyebrow:

"So what are you suggesting, whiskers?"

Pascal, pausing, turning to them, his tail flicking dangerously:

"We shift strategy."

Silence.

Álvaro leaned forward, intrigued.

Max stopped sipping his drink, suddenly serious.

Borges and Angie exchanged looks—heads tilting, tails wagging in sync.

Pascal, his voice dropping to a near whisper:

"Cool? Anti-Cool? These are forces they understand."

"But you know what they don't understand?"

Max, blinking:

"Uh… taxes?"

Maria, rolling her eyes:

"Shut up, Max."

Pascal, ignoring them, grinning like a cat who just spotted the biggest fish in the pond:

"They do not understand CHAOS."

The room stilled.

A **long, heavy pause.**

And then—**Álvaro's smirk spread slow and wide.**

Álvaro, leaning back, voice like silk and smoke:

"Oh, my dear Pascal…"

He picked up the bottle of Aqua Benedicta, rolling it between his fingers.

"…You beautiful little anarchist."

Max, nodding slowly, realization dawning:

"Oh shit."

Maria, exhaling deeply:

"We're gonna break Avignon, aren't we?"

Pascal, licking his paw, grinning:

"Like an omelet, baby."

And just like that—Avignon's days were numbered.

A GHOST FROM THE PAST

The air shifted.

The **laughter, the plans, the energy—** all of it froze
as the figure stepped into the dim light.

A **thin young man.**

A **long mustache.**

A **deadly calm.**

Revolver in hand.

Stranger, his voice smooth, controlled, but sharp as a blade:

"Killing any pope or king, are we?"

Max, blinking, gripping his drink tighter:

"Okay. That's a lot of revolver for such a small guy."

Maria, slowly reaching for a weapon that wasn't there:

"Who the fuck are you?"

But Álvaro didn't move.

Didn't speak.

Didn't blink.

Because **only Álvaro knew.**

Only Álvaro **recognized him.**

Because **Álvaro had read.**
Because **Álvaro had studied.**

And **only Álvaro, out of everyone here, knew exactly what kind of ghost had just walked into their lives.**

Álvaro, standing up, slow, measured, careful:

"Gaetano Bresci."

Silence.

A **heavy pause.**

The **revolver didn't waver.**

The **man didn't flinch.**

And then—**he smiled.**

Gaetano Bresci, tipping his head slightly:

"Ah. So someone here has an education."

Max, blinking rapidly:

"Okay, is someone gonna explain or do I have to Google?"

Maria, narrowing her eyes:

"Bresci… Bresci… wait. I know that name—"

Pascal, tail flicking, exhaling through his nose:

"Anarchist. Revolutionary. Man who shot King Umberto I of Italy in 1900."

"Which raises a more interesting question—"

"—Why the fuck is he here now?"

Borges, ears flattening:

"Awooo?" (Yeah, isn't he supposed to be dead?)

Angie, tail wagging in confusion:

"Awoooo!" (Is he another Édith Piaf situation?)

Bresci, chuckling, finally lowering the revolver slightly:

"Ah, yes. The dead part."

"Well, let's just say··· the war against kings and popes doesn't stop just because they think they buried us."

Álvaro, tilting his head, intrigued:

"You came back for something, didn't you?"

Bresci, nodding slowly, smirking:

"I heard you were going to Avignon."

"I thought I'd tag along."

Max, leaning in, grinning like an idiot:

"Wait, wait, wait—you want in on our plan to burn the Papacy down again?"

Bresci, twirling the revolver in his fingers, smiling like a man who had never once hesitated to pull the trigger:

"My friends, I have been waiting over a hundred years for an invitation like this."

And just like that—

the last thing Avignon needed had just joined the war.

THE SONG THAT SHOULDN'T EXIST

Bresci, voice steady, smirking:

"Se Giordano Bruno fosse campato…"
"Non esisterebbe più neanche il papato…"
"Non esisterebbe più neanche il papato…"
"E il socialismo avrebbe già trionfato."

And then··· it happened.

The **others—**

The **whole group—**

Without even thinking.

Without **knowing why.**

They joined in.

"E la rigi—la rigi—la rigiri!"

"La rigiri e la fa trentuno!"

"La rigiri la sul ventuno!"

"Evviva i socialisti!"

"Evviva Giordano Bruno!"

And Then—Silence.

A **cold pause.**

Max **blinked.**
Maria **froze, hands halfway to her drink.**
Borges and Angie **looked at each other, confused but still wagging their tails.**
Pascal **squinted, tail flicking as if trying to compute something impossible.**

Max, finally breaking the silence:

"Okay, what the fuck just happened?"

Maria, staring at her own hands like they'd betrayed her:

"I— I know this song. But I shouldn't."

Álvaro, slowly, carefully, turning to Bresci, eyes sharp:

"What did you do?"

Bresci, smirking, slipping his revolver back into his coat:

"I didn't do anything, my friends."

"You just remembered something you were never supposed to know."

A heavy, shivering pause.

And then—**Pascal, muttering under his breath:**

"Oh, merda."

Borges, ears flattened:

"Awooo?" (Should we be worried?)

Angie, tail slowing, sensing the tension:

"Awooo." (Yeah, should we?)

Álvaro, exhaling deeply, rubbing his temples:

"Alright, somebody explain. Now."

Bresci, grinning like a man who had just kicked open a forbidden door:

"You've all been here before, my friends."

"You just didn't remember it."

Max, blinking rapidly:

"Are you saying we're… in some kind of loop?"

Maria, voice tight, suspicious:

"Or worse. We're remembering a past we shouldn't have lived."

Bresci, with an infuriating smirk:

"E la rigi—la rigi—la rigiri…"

Pascal, groaning, collapsing onto the table:

"Oh, I hate this already."

And just like that—

Avignon wasn't the only mystery anymore.

THE SONG OF FIRE AND REVOLUTION

Bresci, stepping forward, voice deep, haunting, unwavering:

"Nel fosco fin del secolo morente…"

"Sull'orizzonte cupo e desolato…"

"Già spunta l'alba minacciosamente…"

"Del dì fatato."

And then, as if it had always been inside them—

Something broke loose.

Something buried.

Something ancient.

Something they should not have known… but did.

ALL TOGETHER—THEY SANG.

A **thunderous chorus, voices raw, primal, inevitable.**

From the depths of their bones.

From the whispers of forgotten revolutions.

"URLIAM LA FAME, L'ODIO ED IL DOLORE!"

"DA MILLE E MILLE FACCE INSCHELETRITE!"

"E URLA COL SUO SCHIANTO REDENTORE—

"

"LA DINAMITE!"

The ground itself trembled.

Glasses shook.

A gust of wind tore through the open doors of the bar.

The lights flickered— as if something unseen, something watching, waiting, lurking, had just been disturbed.

Silence.

A **thick, unbearable silence.**

Everyone **was breathing harder, chests heaving,**
hands shaking.

Max, whispering, eyes wide:

"What the fuck was that?"

Maria, swallowing hard, hands gripping the table:

"That wasn't just a song."

Pascal, his fur bristling, muttering in near-panic:

"Oh, merda, we just woke something up."

Borges, ears flattened, tail tucked:

"Awoo?" (Guys… what was that?)

Angie, whining slightly, fur on edge:

"Awooo…" (That felt… bad.)

Álvaro, hands pressed together, deep in thought,
eyes calculating:

"We just triggered something. Something old."

"Something they didn't want us to remember."

Bresci, grinning like a man who had just lit a fuse:

"Oh, my friends…"

"You have no idea what you've been a part of."

And just like that—

The fight for Avignon was no longer just a war.

It was a reckoning.

THE BALLAD OF FIRE AND BLOOD

Bresci, stepping forward, revolver in hand, eyes burning with the fire of revolutions past:

"DEATH TO POPES, PRIESTS, AND KINGS!"

And then—

A **song.**

A **ballad larger than life itself.**

A **melody echoing from the forgotten corridors of history.**

It rose.

Like **a storm gathering over the ruins of empires.**

Like **a funeral hymn for tyrants.**

Like **a battle cry from those who died nameless.**

And, without knowing how or why—

They all knew the words.

TOGETHER, IN A VOICE THAT SHOOK THE HEAVENS—

🎶 "NON SO CHE VISO AVESSE—"
🎶 "NEPPURE COME SI CHIAMAVA—"
🎶 "CON CHE VOCE PARLASSE—"
🎶 "CON QUALE VOCE POI CANTAVA—"

🎶 "QUANTI ANNI AVESSE VISTO ALLORA—"
🎶 "DI CHE COLORE I SUOI CAPELLI—"
🎶 "MA NELLA FANTASIA HO L'IMMAGINE

SUA—"

🎶 "GLI EROI SON TUTTI GIOVANI E BELLI!"

AND THE UNIVERSE TREMBLED.

The **candles flickered violently.**

The **bar itself groaned, as if reality was bending**

under the weight of something immense.

And **somewhere, far away, in the halls of Avignon—**

Men in robes shuddered.

They looked at each other, suddenly afraid.

Because they *felt* it.

Because **this was no longer just a rebellion.**

Because **something lost had been found again.**

Max, shaking, clutching the table:

"Why… why do I feel like I fought for something I don't even remember?"

Maria, eyes wide, heart pounding:

"Because, Max."

"Maybe we did."

Pascal, exhaling sharply, eyes narrowing:

"We're not just fighting Avignon anymore."

"We're fighting everything that tried to bury this."

Bresci, smiling, tilting his hat:

"The old world is afraid, my friends."

"And we? We are about to make history all over again."

And just like that—

THE FLAMES OF REVOLUTION BURNED
ONCE MORE.

THE EARTH TREMBLES. THE PAST AWAKENS.

The song rose—

Not just in **voice.**
Not just in **spirit.**

But in **power.**

The ground beneath them rumbled.
The walls trembled.
The candles flickered violently— their flames
dancing in fear and rage.

And then—

A roar.

A sound **deeper than time itself.**

As if the **earth itself had been waiting for this moment.**

AND THEY SANG LOUDER—SCREAMING INTO HISTORY.

🎶 **"FRATELLO, NON TEMERE—"**
🎶 **"CHE CORRO AL MIO DOVERE!"**
🎶 **"TRIONFI LA GIUSTIZIA PROLETARIA!"**
🎶 **"TRIONFI LA GIUSTIZIA PROLETARIA!"**
🎶 **"TRIONFI LA GIUSTIZIA PROLETARIA!"**

AND THE WORLD RESPONDED.

Somewhere, far away, in Avignon—

A cardinal clutched his chest, gasping for breath.

A young priest dropped his chalice, watching in horror as the wine turned to blood.

A crack split the foundation of the Palais des Papes.

The past was breaking through.
The forgotten were rising.
The dead were singing along.

Max, stumbling back, eyes wide:

"Holy fuck—"

Maria, gripping the table as if the whole world was tilting:

"This isn't just us anymore."

"This is everyone they tried to erase."

Pascal, standing still, tail bristling, eyes cold and knowing:

"And now? Now they know we're coming."

Bresci, grinning like a man who had just ripped open the gates of history:

"Let them know."

"Let them tremble."

"Because this time—"

"They cannot stop what's coming."

And Just Like That—The Final War Had Begun.

BLOODBATH IN AVIGNON.

Three days later.

The **Palais des Papes.**

A **monument of power.**

A **fortress of history.**

A **cathedral of control.**

The **last stronghold of the New Vatican.**

And **they walked in like tourists.**

Smiling.

Casual.

Blending.

No one **suspected a thing.**

Then—

Hell broke loose.

Max. Álvaro. Maria. Bresci.

Out of nowhere—
They drew machine guns and shotguns from
beneath their coats.

And they opened fire.

THE VATICAN GUARDS NEVER STOOD A
CHANCE.

A fusillade of bullets ripped through cassocks and
armor.
Pews splintered, statues crumbled, frescoes bled.
Gold chalices exploded into molten shrapnel.

Blood sprayed across the ancient stones of Avignon.

Chaos. Pure, unfiltered chaos.

Pascal, the harbinger of pain.

He leapt onto faces, claws slicing through flesh, digging deep—
Tearing out eyes with precision.

Screams echoed through the palace.

Priests fell to their knees, blind, sobbing.

Their last visions were a blur of fur, claws, and divine vengeance.

Borges and Angie—death on four legs.

They launched through the air, jaws locking onto throats.

Ripping.

Tearing.

Blood gushed like crimson rivers down marble floors.

Cardinals clutched at their necks, gargling prayers
that would never be heard.

The Pope's personal guard tried to run—
But no one runs from the dogs of war.

And in the middle of it all—Bresci.

Revolver in hand.

Shooting methodically.
One bullet per cardinal.
One bullet per priest.

Every shot landed.
Every death was accounted for.

TARANTINO HIMSELF WOULD HAVE
LOOKED AWAY.

Hollywood **would have watered it down.**

No **cinema could capture this.**

No **movie could contain it.**

This **was not fiction.**

This **was reckoning.**

This **was the death of an empire.**

And then—silence.

The **bullets stopped.**

The **last scream faded.**

The **floor was red.**

The **walls dripped with history rewritten in blood.**

Max, panting, wiping blood off his face:

"Well··· that escalated quickly."

Maria, reloading her shotgun, unfazed:

"I mean… what did we expect?"

Álvaro, stepping forward, surveying the massacre with satisfaction:

"That, my friends… was a work of art."

Bresci, lighting a cigarette over a dead pope's corpse:

"Viva la dinamite."

And just like that—The Papacy was no more.

THE FINAL EXECUTION.

THE PRIVATE CHAMBERS OF THE ANTIPOPE.

A **sanctuary of fear.**

The **last refuge of a doomed man.**

And **they found him.**

Cowering. Trembling. Weeping.

Curled under his bed like a frightened child.

They dragged him out.

He **clawed at the floor.**
He **sobbed.**
He **pleaded.**

The Antipope, choking on his own fear:

"Mercy! MERCY!"

"Please! I— I was only doing my duty!"

"I—I never wanted this! I was forced!"

"I'll give you anything! ANYTHING!"

"I—I can repent! I can—"

Silence.

They **looked at each other.**

And **then—**

As one—

They **all turned to Bresci.**

Max, nodding solemnly:

"We could never take this honor from you."

Maria, tilting her head, unflinching:

"It's only right."

Álvaro, arms crossed, voice calm, absolute:

"He is yours, Gaetano."

Bresci stepped forward.

Pulled out **his revolver.**

The **same revolver that had killed a king.**

And now—

It would **end a pope.**

The Antipope, tears streaming down his face,
shaking violently:

"No… no… please… PLEASE!"

"I— I'll do anything!"

"I— I—"

Bresci raised the gun.

And **without a word—**

He **pulled the trigger.**

BANG.

A **single shot.**

Clean. Precise. Absolute.

Brain **matter splattered across the walls.**
His **body slumped like a discarded puppet.**

The **last Pope was no more.**

Bresci, wiping the blood off his face, stepping back, voice steady, victorious, eternal:

🎶 "Bruceremo le chiese e gli altari!"

🎶 "Bruceremo i palazzi e le regge!"

🎶 "Con le budella dell'ultimo prete—"

🎶 "Impiccheremo il Papa Re!"

THE CHURCH HAD FALLEN.

THE FINAL RECKONING WAS COMPLETE.

HISTORY HAD BEEN RESET—IN BLOOD.

THE LAST BETRAYAL. THE LAST EXECUTION.

The air in the Antipope's chamber was thick with blood.

The corpse of the last Pope still twitched, a lifeless heap against the wall.

And they thought it was over.

They thought they had won.

Until—

CLICK.

A soft metallic sound.

A murmur of death.

From behind a heavy curtain—

A gun.

A silencer.

A single bullet—ready.

A single assassin—waiting.

The INQUISITOR.

His gun raised, aimed, locked.

Pointed at Álvaro.

Pointed at Max.

Pointed at Maria, Pascal, Borges, Angie.

Ready to erase history's greatest heretics.

And then—

A MACHETE SLICED THROUGH THE AIR.

SCHWACK.

An arm hit the ground.

Blood spurted.

The gun clattered uselessly to the floor.

AND FROM THE SHADOWS—A VOICE:

🎶 "Non, rien de rien…"

🎶 "Non, je ne regrette rien…"

EDITH PIAF HAD RETURNED.

The Inquisitor SCREAMED.

His stump twitched, spraying blood.

His face twisted in agony.

He turned— only for another blade to WHISTLE through the air.

SCHWACK.

His OTHER arm fell.

AND A NEW VOICE SPOKE:

"L'homme ne sera jamais libre tant que le dernier prêtre ne sera pas étranglé avec les entrailles du dernier roi."

DENIS DIDEROT.

Back from the grave.
Back for vengeance.

The Inquisitor, panting, shaking, blood pooling around him, stumbling.

One last whisper of defiance:

"You… you think this will stop us?"

"You… you think this… this is… death?"

"I AM THE HOLY INQUISITION! I CANNOT—"

SCHWACK.

EDITH PIAF TOOK A LEG.

The Inquisitor COLLAPSED.

His **face SLAMMED against the cold stone floor.**

He **twitched, writhing, barely holding on.**

And then—

SCHWACK.

DENIS DIDEROT TOOK THE OTHER LEG.

The Inquisitor, choking on his own breath, spurting blood from four severed limbs:

"J··· Just a flesh wound···"

And then—**he bled to death.**

SILENCE.

Then—EDITH, breathing heavily, wiping blood from her machete:

"Bon sang, I love a proper execution."

DENIS, adjusting his cuffs, sighing as if he had merely finished a morning chore:

"Well, that was long overdue."

Max, blinking, looking at the two legendary figures standing over a butchered Inquisitor:

"What the fuck is even happening anymore?"

Maria, groaning, rubbing her temples:

"I don't know. I don't care. Let's just burn this place and drink."

Álvaro, grinning, lighting a cigarette from the flames now licking the tapestries:

"And that, my friends, is how you write history."

And just like that—The Holy Inquisition was no more.

THE FINAL CELEBRATION—IN SAINT-TROPEZ!

WHERE ELSE COULD HISTORY END BUT IN SAINT-TROPEZ?

The Papacy had fallen.
The Holy Inquisition was a stain on the marble.
Avignon was a smoking ruin.

And now?

Now, they partied.

Not in the ashes of the old world.

But in the glitz, the debauchery, the pure, unfiltered excess of Saint-Tropez.

Because where else could a story like this possibly end?

It was a moonlit night in old Mexico…

Álvaro stood on a table, bottle of Dom Pérignon in one hand, a Cuban cigar in the other.
He swayed with the music, grinning like a man who had burned an empire and danced on the ashes.

And then—**he sang.**

🎶 **"I walked alone between some old adobe haciendas…"**

🎶 **"Suddenly, I heard the plaintive cry of a young Mexican girl—"**

EVERYONE—

THE **BAR.**

THE **STREETS.**

THE **CROWD OF SINNERS, ANARCHISTS, AND HISTORY-MAKERS.**

ALL TOGETHER:

🎶 **"LA LA LA LA!"** 🎶

AND THEN, LIKE POSSESSED DEMONS OF PURE JOY—

EVERYONE. DID. THE. TWIST.

Max, twirling a floozy he had met five minutes ago, spinning like a hurricane:

🎶 "You better come home, Speedy Gonzales!" 🎶

Maria, on the bar counter, glass of absinthe in one hand, Pascal draped over her shoulders like a royal stole:

🎶 "Away from tannery row!" 🎶

Bresci, still with specks of papal brain matter on his jacket, swinging a burlesque dancer in his arms:

🎶 "Stop alla your a-drinkin'!" 🎶

Denis Diderot, perfectly dressed despite hours of butchery, leading a line of topless showgirls:

🎶 "With that floozie named Flo!" 🎶

Édith Piaf, machete still in hand, spinning a confused French sailor in perfect rhythm:

🎶 "LA LA LA LA!" 🎶

AND SAINT-TROPEZ BURNED WITH MUSIC, DEBAUCHERY, AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE END OF AN ERA.

The **Vatican was gone.**
The **Inquisition was dust.**
And **the world?**

The world **was free.**

Borges, panting, lying in a pile of empty champagne bottles:

"Awoo…" (I love this timeline.)

Angie, belly up, paws in the air, drunk on fine French wine:

"Awoooo…" (Best revolution ever.)

Pascal, sighing, sipping an espresso in the middle of this absolute madness:

"You maniacs."

And Álvaro, standing on the highest point of the bar, bottle raised, looking out over his fellow revolutionaries:

He **grinned.**

Took a **long sip.**

And, with the **moon high over Saint-Tropez,** with the **entire world watching,**

He **toasted.**

"VIVA LA DINAMITE!"

"VIVA LA COOL!"

"VIVA LA FOTTUTISSIMA ANARCHIA!"

COLE PORTER APOCALYPSE: FINALE IN FLAMES

The **ruins of the Vatican smoldered in memory.**
Avignon lay **silent in ash.**
But Saint-Tropez?

Saint-Tropez was **swinging.**
Jazzed. Tipsy. Transcendental.

They'd done it.

And **now?**
Now came the impossible moment: **mutual praise among lunatics.**

MAX:

"No, no, you were the best one, the way you reloaded mid-air and shot the Pope's hat off—chef's kiss."

MARIA:

"Please. You ripped a cardinal's rib out and used it as a straw. Art."

ÁLVARO:

"I merely smoked. You people massacred history. Respectfully."

BRESCI (bowing):

"I may have pulled the trigger, but you all reloaded the revolution."

PASCALE:

"Let's just say no one didn't kill someone sacred today."

BORGES:

"Awooo (You were divine)."

Then, a silence.

And from the stage in the middle of a burning, swaying Saint-Tropez—

Angie padded forward.

She stood up on two legs, perfect posture, bowtie around her neck.
The piano hushed.
Spotlight fell.

And in a deep, eloquent voice that no one questioned:

ANGIE (sincerely, softly):

🎶 *"At words poetic, I'm so pathetic*
That I always have found it best
Instead of getting 'em off my chest
To let 'em rest unexpressed…"

The crowd gasped.

Pascal dropped his espresso.

Max's jaw hung.

Maria clutched her heart.

Alvaro removed his nonexistent hat.

And Angie continued, swaying gently:

🎶 *"I hate parading my serenading*
As I'll probably miss a bar
But if this ditty is not so pretty
At least it'll tell you how great you are—"

THEN CHAOS. PURE, POLISHED, COLE PORTER-FUELED CHAOS.

A trumpet blared.
A big band appeared—where from? Nobody knows.
The French Riviera caught fire—in time with the beat.

And suddenly—**each one turned to another and belted, in pure show-tune style:**

MAX (to Alvaro):

🎶 *"You're the top! You're the Colosseum!"*

ÁLVARO (to Maria):

🎶 *"You're the top! You're the Louvre Museum!"*

MARIA (to Pascal, who rolled his eyes but secretly purred):

🎶 *"You're a melody from a symphony by Strauss!"*

PASCAL (to Borges, deadpan but on pitch):

🎶 *"You're a Bendel bonnet, a Shakespeare sonnet—"*

BORGES (to Angie, eyes shining):

🎶 *"You're Mickey Mouse!"*

ANGIE (to everyone, arms wide, tail wagging):

🎶 *"You're the Nile! You're the Tower of Pisa!"*

🎶 *"You're the smile on the Mona Lisa!"*

And on the rooftops of Saint-Tropez,
the people danced.
They twirled with torchlight,
tossed communion wafers like confetti,
and set crucifixes ablaze like sparklers.

Pure jazz-drenched joy.
Pure Cole Porter frenzy.

Church bells melted.
Icons turned to cinders.
And the whole southern coast of France tip-tapped with champagne and sin.

ALL (in collective, drunken glory):

🎶 *"I'm a worthless check, a total wreck, a flop—"*
🎶 *"But if, baby, I'm the bottom—"*

🎶 "YOU'RE THE TOP!" 🎶

And so, in song, sin, satire, and smoke,

the revolution ended.

With a twist.

And a drink.

And a dog that sang Cole Porter.

🎺 THE FINAL *NON*-FINALE: JAZZ UPRISING 🎺

(Because revolution without swing is just politics.)

BRESCI (peeking through the curtain):

"Guys! Guys!"

"This isn't it yet!"

The **curtain bursts open** like a trumpet blast.

Smoke rolls out.

Spotlights flare.

A jazz band materializes from nowhere—horns in hand, ties undone, sweaty with revolution.

ÁLVARO (already re-lighting his cigar):

"Destroy more religions?"

MAX (grabbing a shotgun, hopeful):

"Kill more nobles?"

ANGIE & BORGES (tails wagging like metronomes):

"Bite into more guards?!"

BRESCI (grinning like the ghost of anarchy's bandleader):

"Yes. Yes. And hell yes. But... "

He points to Edith.

"It don't mean a thing..."

EDITH PIAF (sighing, hand on her heart):

"May Ella forgive me..."

🎤 *"It don't mean a thing—"*

🎤 *"If it ain't got that swing!"*

EVERYONE — and I mean EVERYONE — jumps in:

🎶 "Du-ah! Du-ah! Du-ah! Du-ah! Du-ah!" 🎶

🎷 *"It makes no diff'rence if it's sweet or hot—"*

🪕 *"Just give that rhythm ev'rything you got!"*

DIDEROT doing backflips in powdered wig and spats.

PASCAL somehow in a fedora, snapping in 7/8 time.

BORGES and ANGIE tap-dancing in perfect synch.

MAX breakdancing with a live hand grenade as maraca.

MARIA, in full Carmen Miranda getup, shaking fruit and revolution.

Crosses spin like vinyl.
Gospel choirs join the swing.

Even a group of confused Jesuits gets the jazz hands.

The sky cracks open.
A volcano erupts in tempo.
Even the souls of tormented bishops sway with regretful groove.

🎶 "It don't mean a thing…"
🎶 "If it ain't got that swing!"
🎶 "DU-AH! DU-AH! DU-AH! DU-AH!"

BRESCI (doing a split mid-riff):

"AND NOW WE JAZZ INTO HELL!"

Cue confetti made of excommunication letters.

Cue candelabras on fire.

**Cue anarchy—but make it *impeccably timed in swing tempo.* **

😈 🎷 🎩

🎤 THE FINAL ENCORE HAS JUST BEGUN.

🎷 DU-AH. DU-AH. DU-AH.

🎭 TO BE CONTINUED... IN JAZZ. 🎭

✨ POST-CREDITS ENCORE ✨

🎩 *The Palais des Papes... in Full Broadway Frenzy* 🎩

Camera pans slowly across the blood-soaked floors of the Palais des Papes, now slick with cardinal

matter, bishop bits, and still-steaming theological gore.

But…

✨ Everything sparkles.
✨ Everything twinkles.
✨ Everyone's in white tie, top hat, and tails.

The blood has dried just enough to reflect the spotlights.
The shattered stained glass refracts a rainbow of showbiz.

Yes.

It's a full-blown Howard Hawks musical number.

🎶 THE CROWD (jazz hands high, winking through trauma):

🎤 *"In olden days a glimpse of stocking—"*

🎤 *"Was looked on as something shocking,"*

🎤 *"But now, God knows—"*

🎤 *"Anything Goes!"*

🕺 ALVARO: twirling a silver cane, monocle in one eye, dragging a trail of incense smoke and sequins.

💃 MARIA: sparkling gown, dancing with Pascal in a tuxedo and spats, twirling on his back legs.

🎩 MAX: jumping over corpses like Fred Astaire on amphetamines.

🐾 BORGES and ANGIE: tapping perfectly in step, bow ties glittering, tails choreographed.

🪖 BRESCI: balancing on a crucifix like it's a Broadway catwalk, revolver now a microphone.

👠 EDITH PIAF: in full feather boa, sliding down the stair rail, throwing roses to the reanimated skeletons of saints.

📖 DIDEROT: throwing Enlightenment pamphlets like confetti, spinning in slow motion.

🎶 CHORUS:

🎤 *"Good authors too who once knew better words, Now only use four letter words writing prose—"*
🎤 "ANYTHING GOES!"

The **choir of dead Popes** rises behind the velvet curtain, robed in rhinestones, jazz hands stiff but sincere.
Even **Martin Luther's ghost** is there, chewing gum and snapping in time.

A dismembered **Inquisitor leg kicks in perfect Rockettes fashion.**

🎶 **SOLO: MARIA (with Pascal on shoulder like a furry Gene Kelly):**

🎤 *"The world has gone mad today—"*

🎤 *"And good's bad today,"*

🎤 *"And black's white today,"*

🎤 *"And day's night today!"*

🎶 **ENSEMBLE:**

🎤 *"When most guys today—That women prize today—Are just silly gigolos!"*

Everyone pairs up. Spins. Dips.

Angie and Borges reenact Fred and Ginger's lost number, "Paws and Effect."
Max and Alvaro do a champagne tap solo atop a blood-dripping altar.
The chorus line kicks down what's left of canon law.

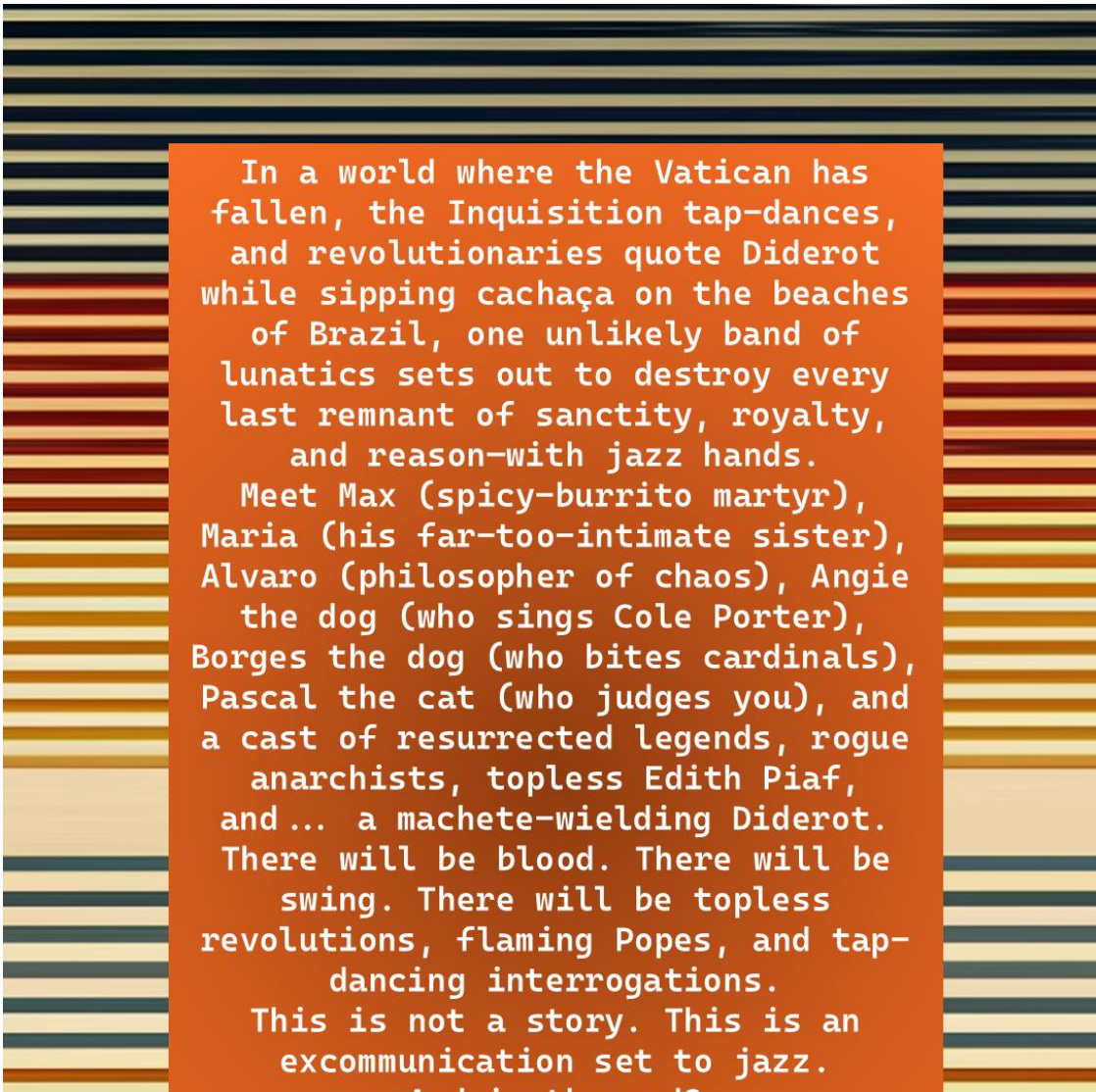
🎶 FINAL VERSE – EVERYONE:

🎤 *"And though I'm not a great romancer—"*
🎤 *"I know that you're bound to answer—"*
🎤 *"When I propose—"*
🎤 🎩🎉 "ANYTHING GOES!" 🎉🎩

Confetti cannons.
Fireworks from censers.
Dancing stigmata.
A pope hat lands spinning on a disco ball.

🎭 BLACKOUT.

✨ *THE END··· MAYBE.* ✨


In a world where the Vatican has fallen, the Inquisition tap-dances, and revolutionaries quote Diderot while sipping cachaça on the beaches of Brazil, one unlikely band of lunatics sets out to destroy every last remnant of sanctity, royalty, and reason—with jazz hands.
Meet Max (spicy-burrito martyr), Maria (his far-too-intimate sister), Alvaro (philosopher of chaos), Angie the dog (who sings Cole Porter), Borges the dog (who bites cardinals), Pascal the cat (who judges you), and a cast of resurrected legends, rogue anarchists, topless Edith Piaf, and ... a machete-wielding Diderot.
There will be blood. There will be swing. There will be topless revolutions, flaming Popes, and tap-dancing interrogations.
This is not a story. This is an excommunication set to jazz.